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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

Ivory Coast...*Les Elephants* celebrate winning the 2023 AFCON trophy on home soil ***(more on page 62)***

England...Arsenal captain Martin Odegaard makes use of a camera after his side's vital Premier League win v Liverpool

Brazil...an emotional Rafinha celebrates after helping Sao Paulo win the Brazilian Super Cup

United States...LAFC goalkeeper Hugo Lloris watches his team take on Seattle Sounders through a cloud of yellow smoke during his MLS debut

Germany...Saarbucken's ground staff attempt to clear a waterlogged pitch ahead of the German Cup quarter-final with Borussia Monchengladbach. The game was eventually postponed *(more on page 44)*

Argentina...the ref attempts to bring order during River Plate's clash v Boca Juniors in the first *Superclasico* of 2024

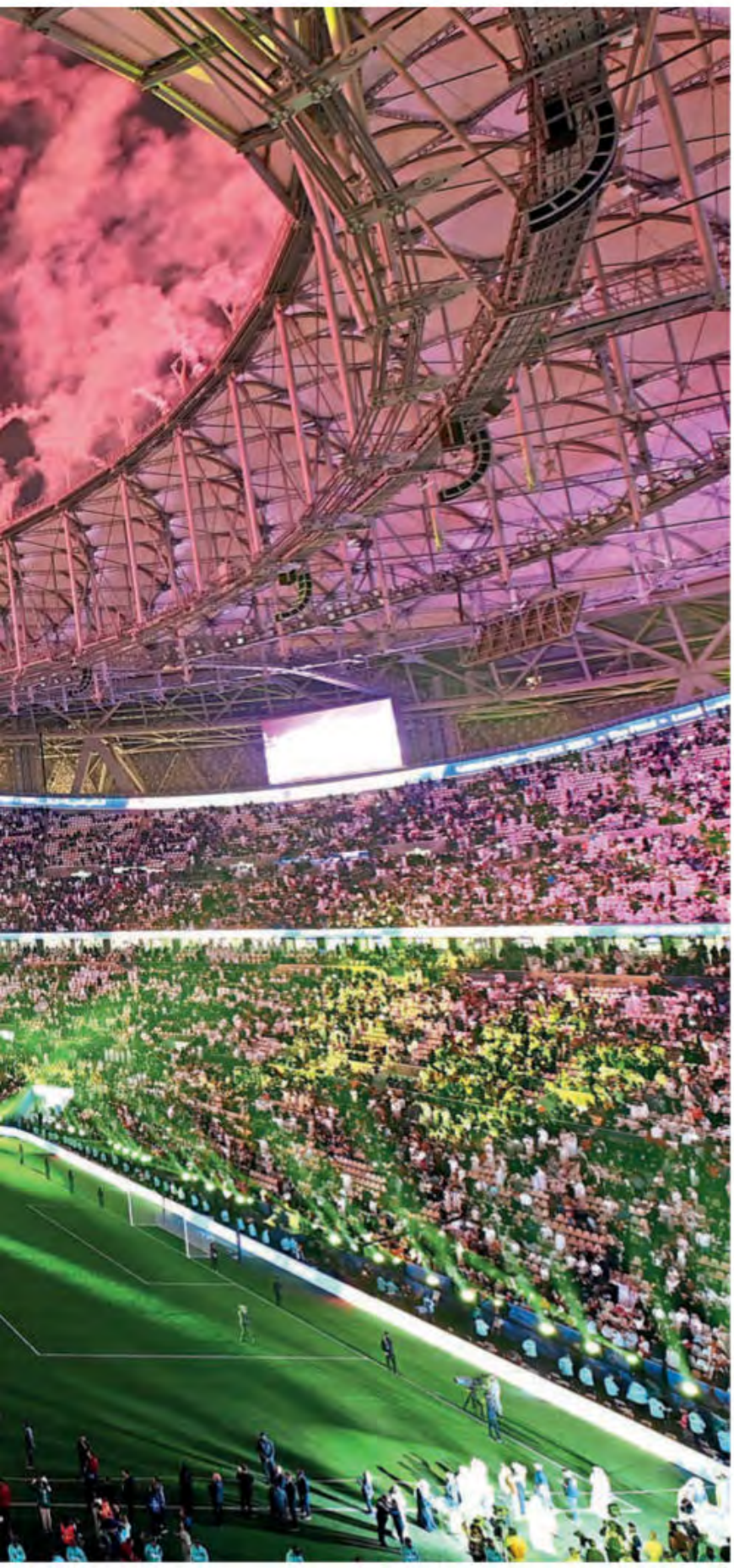
Hong Kong...a ship bearing Lionel Messi's face ahead of Inter Miami's friendly against a Hong Kong XI

Qatar...South Korea captain Son Heung-min's extra-time free-kick hits the back of the net in the Asian Cup quarter-final versus Australia

Ivory Coast... thousands of Ivory Coast fans line the streets of Abidjan to celebrate their country's 2023 AFCON victory

Qatar...fireworks are set off during the 2023 Asian Cup trophy ceremony after Qatar retain their crown *(more on page 68)*

Ivory Coast...DR Congo's players raise awareness of the ongoing violence in their country as their national anthem plays at the 2023 AFCON finals



Qatar...Jordan's Abdallah Nasib celebrates during his team's historic run to the final of the Asian Cup

Ivory Coast...South Africa keeper Ronwen Williams wheels off in celebration after his record-breaking display during *Bafana Bafana's* penalty-shootout win against Cape Verde

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FROM THE EDITOR

Sometimes it's hard to be a football fan.

Yet as the sport increasingly moves away from its roots and feels consumed by greed and cynicism, this issue of *World Soccer* is filled with things to help restore your faith in the good of the game, including fairy tales of underdogs and cup magic, a club built by its fans, a few conquering heroes returning to their childhood teams, a handful of rising starlets, and international football at its best.

It feels like a long time ago now that Ivory Coast's Max Gradel lifted the AFCON trophy high into the night sky, one day after Qatar had won their own continental title on home soil.

These days, dismissing international football and complaining when it dares to interrupt the domestic calendar seems to be common. Yet this year's Africa Cup of Nations and Asian Cup tournaments demonstrated that it is capable of hitting emotional heights that the club game – or arguably any other sport – just can't quite reach. The stories conjured up by Ivory Coast, Jordan, South Africa, Palestine, DR Congo, Syria, Cape Verde and many others were sometimes uplifting, sometimes heartbreaking, but always compelling, and few more so than the main character in the AFCON final: Sebastien Haller.

This issue is filled with things to help restore your faith in the good of the game

Haller's story transcends football. Ivory Coast's match-winner in the final not only survived a cancer diagnosis but also injuries, rejection and downright bad luck to become a national hero in the country of his mother's birth.

The good news for lovers of the international game is that there is plenty more to come this year. The upcoming March international break will include the Euro 2024 play-offs – a sure-fire guarantee of drama and emotion – and UEFA Nations League play-outs, as well as the CONCACAF Nations League finals and final qualifiers for this summer's Copa America. In February, CONMEBOL confirmed which two men's teams will represent South America at this summer's Olympics, with a number of thrilling young stars emerging in the process.

For all of the above and more, read on. Hopefully it'll make you'll feel a little better about the world's best game.

Jamie Evans, Managing Editor

FIFA

FIFA Series to kick-off in March

This year's March international break will see a pilot edition of the FIFA Series, a new initiative from the world's governing body designed to provide more international playing opportunities, with the full roll-out expected in March 2026.

As reported in the April 2023 edition of *World Soccer*, the series will be staged every March before major championships in even-numbered years and will pit countries from different confederations against each other.

While inter-confederation friendlies between major nations have been commonplace for decades, friendlies between smaller nations from different continents are rarer and the new initiative will attempt to address that.

"The FIFA Series is a really positive step forward for national-team football at global level," said FIFA president Gianni Infantino. "Our member associations have been telling us for a long time now of their desire to test themselves against their counterparts from all around the world, and now they can do so."

The upcoming pilot will see three countries – Algeria, Azerbaijan and Sri Lanka – hosting three other nations each, while eight teams

"We have to get used to not playing with Kylian [Mbappe], sooner or later it's going to happen"

Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique hints that his star player could leave soon, amid growing reports linking Mbappe with a move to Real Madrid

FIFA Series... FIFA president Gianni Infantino is behind the new initiative

will head to Saudi Arabia. None of the teams involved will play more than two games in the upcoming series, but future editions could involve a group format with all four teams facing each other.

FIFA Series: ALGERIA
- **Algeria** *(CAF)*
- **Andorra** *(UEFA)*
- **Bolivia** *(CONMEBOL)*
- **South Africa** *(CAF)*

FIFA Series: AZERBAIJAN
- **Azerbaijan** *(UEFA)*
- **Bulgaria** *(UEFA)*
- **Mongolia** *(AFC)*
- **Tanzania** *(CAF)*

FIFA Series: SAUDI ARABIA A
- **Cape Verde** *(CAF)*
- **Cambodia** *(AFC)*
- **Equatorial Guinea** *(CAF)*
- **Guyana** *(CONCACAF)*

FIFA Series: SAUDI ARABIA B
- **Bermuda** *(CONCACAF)*
- **Brunei Darussalam** *(AFC)*
- **Guinea** *(CAF)*
- **Vanuatu** *(OFC)*

FIFA Series: SRI LANKA
- **Bhutan** *(AFC)*
- **Central African Republic** *(CAF)*
- **Papua New Guinea** *(OFC)*
- **Sri Lanka** *(AFC)*

The month in numbers

Eye-catching facts and stats from the world of football this month...

Welcome to Manchester... Jim Ratcliffe will take charge of United's football operations

27.7%
Share of Manchester United owned by Sir Jim Ratcliffe after the Ineos owner's investment in the Red Devils was approved.

2
Graduates from the Right To Dream academy that will be at Brighton after they confirmed the £16m summer signing of Ibrahim Osman from Nordsjaelland, joining Simon Adingra.

6
Points that Everton have been deducted for breaching the Premier League's profit and sustainability rules after their original deduction of ten was reduced on appeal.

32
Age of Eric Ramsay, who left Manchester United to take charge of Minnesota United and become the youngest coach in MLS.

20
Teams that will continue to play in Serie A after the league's clubs voted against a proposal to reduce the league down to 18.

9
Players to have hit over 100 Serie A goals for Internazionale after Lautaro Martinez passed the landmark in February.

100%
Manchester City striker Erling Haaland has scored against all 21 of the Premier League teams that he has played against.

33
Unbeaten games in a row that Bundesliga leaders Bayer Leverkusen had chalked up in all competitions by the end of February, setting a new record for a German club.

4
Years Juventus' Paul Pogba has been banned from football for after a doping offence. He said he was "sad, shocked and heartbroken", has "never knowingly or deliberately taken any supplements that violate anti-doping regulations" and plans to appeal the ban.

£8.5m
Reported fee that Djurgardens' teen talent Lucas Bergvall will join Tottenham for in July.

38,323
Number of fans that attended Inter Miami's pre-season friendly in Hong Kong against a League XI, only for star attraction Lionel Messi to be left on the bench due to injury.

$860k
Transfer fee paid by NWSL's Bay FC to Madrid CFF for Zambia striker Racheal Kundananji, a new record for the women's game.

€1bn
Value of a proposed sale of Bundesliga TV rights, which was scrapped after a number of protests from fans.

0
English players in West Ham Women's starting line-up when they met Arsenal in February – the first-ever all-foreign XI in WSL history.

27
Successive La Liga games – by the start of March – that Almeria had gone since the start of the season without winning.

£30m
Brentford's record transfer fee reportedly paid for Club Brugge's Brazilian forward Igor Thiago, who will join in the summer.

Incoming Bee...Igor Thiago

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

The reign of Ceferin

The Slovenian will step down as UEFA president when his term ends in 2027

Leaders of the world's sports federations are infamous for their reluctance to step aside. Many, FIFA's Gianni Infantino among them, appear to equate the welfare of the membership with their own continuance in power.

UEFA, in all its 70 years, has been led by only seven presidents. Two died in office (Gustav Wiederkehr and Artemio Franchi), one stood down through ill health (Jacques Georges) and one was banned from football by FIFA (Michel Platini). Only one was voted out (Sweden's Lennart Johansson). But worn down? That was the new twist delivered by Aleksander Ceferin when he handed congress his notice, three years ahead of time.

Several of the executive committee were not amused that the 56-year-old Slovene had let the media in on the secret at a post-congress press conference before he had informed them.

Of course, Ceferin has a long run-in during which he may change his mind or acquiesce to any member associations begging him to hang on for the third and last full presidential term now confirmed as available to him. He told journalists: "Honestly, I'm tired after COVID, two wars, nonsense projects of a Super League...I decided around six months ago that I am not planning to run in 2027 any more. The reason is that after some time every organisation needs fresh blood, but mainly because I was away from my family for seven years and will be away from them for three more."

Ceferin, elected in September 2016, had been the antithesis of his predecessor Michel Platini, beating Dutchman Michael van Praag 42-13 at an extraordinary congress.

Platini had been a superstar footballer and headline-grabbing president before his FIFA ban. Ceferin had been unheralded chair for only five years of the Slovenia FA before being propelled into power by a caucus of eastern European and Nordic federations who wanted "one of their own" to counter the grasping onslaught of the Champions League giants.

UEFA president... Ceferin at February's UEFA Congress

> "Honestly, I'm tired after COVID, two wars, nonsense projects of a Super League"
>
> Ceferin announces his decision not to stand for re-election

Four major issues have weighed on his shoulders during his tenure: FIFA, the COVID pandemic, the Super League and the perpetual agitation of Europe's major clubs.

Ceferin's reign at Nyon has closely tracked that of "Swiss neighbour" Gianni Infantino in Zurich. Infantino was voted into office in February 2016 and Ceferin seven months later, both elected initially to complete the terms of office of predecessors Sepp Blatter and Platini.

Infantino was considered a behind-the-scenes supporter of Ceferin but mutual admiration

faded within months, initially amid Chinese interest in bidding to host the 2030 World Cup. Ceferin immediately snapped: "It's Europe's turn in 2030. Clearly. We will fight for a European host."

Matters slithered from bad to worse. First Ceferin raged at Infantino's sacking of FIFA's judicial directors and then at his "secret" negotiations to sell a chunk of the world federation's media rights for $25 billion to fund his pet Club World Cup expansion. Infantino believed Europe would be out-voted in FIFA Council; he underestimated Ceferin. Same again over the abortive proposal for a World Cup every two years. FIFA-UEFA relations have never been the same.

Football's two most powerful governing bodies had no option but to co-ordinate their support for international football during the pandemic. The stress levels were even more intense for Ceferin because UEFA's riches are founded on the day-by-day European club game in general and the Champions League in particular.

The challenge of keeping the big clubs onside while maintaining an acceptable distribution system is always the number one priority for every UEFA president. Hence Ceferin, while brought to power by the "have-nots", is about to oversee a Champions League group-stage expansion to 36 teams with an extra 64 matches.

COVID cost UEFA €236.5m, a significant slice of its reserves, but the underlying trend remains lucratively upward. UEFA's latest licensing report says its top clubs registered a record combined €24bn in 2022 and that the value of UEFA's competitions has grown 122 per cent in the last ten years.

For Ceferin, however, the emotional stress ran – and continues to run – far deeper than sports politics, business and law. This was not only professional, it was personal. The Super League revolt was led by Andrea Agnelli, not merely the then-president of both Juventus and the European Club Association but a personal friend; Ceferin is godfather to one of Agnelli's daughters.

Reacting to the Super League announcement back in April 2021, Ceferin said: "I've seen many things in my life. I was a criminal lawyer for 24 years so I have seen different people, but I have never, ever seen people like that.

"Andrea Agnelli is the biggest disappointment of all...I've never seen a person who would lie so many times, so persistently, as he did. It's unbelievable.

"On the Saturday he said these were only rumours so don't worry. He said he would call me in one hour and then he turned off the phone. The next day we had the announcement [of the Super League].

"Obviously greed is so strong for some that all human values evaporate, but in UEFA we are different and we will stay different. It's good to learn who is who, and all the world knows now."

Ceferin reflected bitterly on the Super League again at UEFA Congress in February, saying: "Some people think that anything can be bought. Everything is for sale. This is one perspective on life but it is not ours. Football is not for sale. You can't buy dreams. You can't buy sporting merit. You can't buy the values that make football a strong and glorious game. You can't buy 70 years of history."

Clearly, this was not merely a business dispute that could be left behind in the office when Ceferin turned out the lights and went home to his family.

The interim balance of Ceferin's reign can major on Europe securing the centenary World Cup for Spain and Portugal – alongside Morocco – in 2030, with its gesture of an opening party in South America. On the negative side, Ceferin's UEFA failed not only in its organisational care of fans at high-profile finals in London, Paris and Istanbul but in its clumsy responses.

So, what happens now? Interestingly, unlike exco members, a candidate for president does not need to hold what the statutes describe as "an active office of president or vice-president within his member association." Theoretically, this opens the way for a maverick such as, say, recently-exited UEFA Chief of Football Zvonimir Boban. In fact, no likely candidate is obvious right now but at least time is on the side of the "have-nots" as they consider putting their act together once more.

Elected...the Slovenian is congratulated upon his election to the UEFA hot seat back in 2016

BOOKS THIS MONTH

ONE SHILLING
By Matthew Caldwell and Alan Dein (Pitch Publishing, £25)

One Shilling: The Football Programme Design Revolution of 1965-85 is the first-ever exploration of this golden era of football programme design, when the humble football programme suddenly boasted a remarkable variety of eye-catching covers and layouts. This book compiles stunning examples, and tells the stories of those previously unheralded artists, in particular John Elvin, considered the greatest-ever football programme designer.

THE GREAT ADVENTURE
By Tony Banks (Pitch Publishing, £18.99)

The Great Adventure: Al-Fayed's Rollercoaster Ride with Fulham FC is the fascinating tale of Mohamed Al-Fayed's 16-year reign as the owner of Fulham. The flamboyant Egyptian bought the club in 1997, promised to take them to the Premier League in five years, and did it in four. Along the way, Fulham tasted two promotions, European football, ten managers and numerous big signings.

Jonathan WILSON
TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

The AFCON of the century

The 2023 Africa Cup of Nations delivered drama, excitement and quality

You could pretend Ivory Coast won the Africa Cup of Nations because of the balance and flexibility of the midfield shape introduced by Emerse Fae, and it would be partially true. Jean Michael Seri, Franck Kessie and Seko Fofana excelled in both the semi-final and the final. But really it was about something far less explicable, far wilder, far more thrilling than that. Ivory Coast won the Cup of Nations because nobody would work out a way of knocking them out. They lost twice in the group stage, sacked their manager, had a man sent off in the first half of their quarter-final, went behind in three knockout games and still somehow won the thing. So many times did their campaign seem dead, they came to be known as "zombies".

This was, almost certainly, the best Cup of Nations of the century so far. The goals dried up in the knockout stages, but the level of drama remained high and so too did the general level of football. In part, that was down to the quality of the pitches. The surface at Ebimpe, which hosted the final, wasn't great, but it was still better than the average ones in Cameroon three years ago, while the other five were all true and encouraged quicker, possession-based football.

In addition, the number of African coaches probably helped too. When Fae replaced Frenchman Jean-Louis Gasset after the group stage, Ivory Coast became the 14th of the 24 sides to be led by an African. In 2021 the figure was 13 out of 24, and 11 out of 24 in 2019. Where the European journeyman instinctively defends, looking to avoid the sort of eye-catching humiliation that might prevent him picking up another job at the next Cup of Nations, the domestic coach has, at least in theory, a sense of what is good for the development of his nation's football. It's true that these are largely diaspora coaches returning having received their footballing education in Europe rather than African coaching schools producing a mass of top coaches.

Football carnival... fans were treated to the best AFCON finals in years in the Ivory Coast

Assessing quality is necessarily to an extent subjective, but this by and large was varied football with the majority of sides either progressive or, if they were more reactive, having a clear idea of how they wished to attack once they regained the ball. Nigeria made it to the final by dint of having the best defence but for all their back three could at times be criticised as over-conservative, the speed of Calvin Bassey was necessary to compensate for the relative lack of pace of centre-back partners William Troost-Ekong and Semi Ajayi. And they had a clear pattern of counter-attack, with the ball being worked to Moses Simon on the wing and Victor Osimhen typically making a near-post run to draw defenders while Ademola Lookman arrived between the penalty spot and the edge of the box to capitalise on a cut-back. Only in the second half of the final, when fatigue had perhaps set in, did they fall to

spoiling to try to protect their lead.

An ongoing theme of the past decade has been the pyramid growing not necessarily higher but a lot wider. It probably is the case that, Morocco's heroics in Qatar notwithstanding, an African side is no closer to winning the World Cup than they were two decades ago, but it is significant that all eight quarter-finalists were different to Cameroon two years ago. Africa's middle-class, which now must be considered to include Equatorial Guinea, Angola and Cape Verde, is burgeoning, while the likes of Mauritania show the benefit of astute and targeted investment – just as Comoros did two years ago with the same head coach, Amir Abdou.

To say it was the best-organised Cup of Nations of all time is probably true, although the bar is almost subterranean. Why did fans at the main stadium at Ebimpe have to walk through wasteland for around an hour in sweltering conditions to get from the edge of the security cordon to the stadium? Why would you build a 60,000-capacity stadium 30km north of the city centre and not put in place any means to get there other than one crowded road? Why, having arranged shuttles to ferry journalists from Abidjan to certain stadiums, did CAF express shock that they were travelling after dark when one crashed? What did they think busloads of journalists were going to do through the night? And that's before you get to the ongoing obfuscation about when the 2025 tournament in Morocco will take place. The vague insistence on June/July 2025 to reduce scheduling conflicts with the European football calendar simply makes no sense given that this would clash with the newly-expanded FIFA Club World Cup.

But by and large this was a hugely positive tournament. The football was bright, the quality high, the depth impressive, and the story of the champions one of the most thrillingly unpredictable any international tournament has ever known.

OBITUARIES

Icons... Hamrin and Pele on the 50th anniversary of the 1958 World Cup final

Kurt HAMRIN
(1934-2024)

No player has scored more goals for Fiorentina in the club's history than Hamrin; not even Gabriel Batistuta, who fell one short of the Swede's total of 208.

Hamrin arrived in Florence in 1958, weeks after scoring four goals en route to the World Cup final on home soil as Sweden lost to a Pele-inspired Brazil. The winger was the last remaining survivor from that match.

Hamrin was one of a number of talented Swedes lured away from their country's amateur league in the mid-1950s by high-paying Italian clubs. Hamrin initially joined Juventus in 1956, but only lasted a year before joining Padova. He scored 20 goals in 30 games to lead the minnows to a best-ever third place in Serie A.

Sweden's English manager George Raynor convinced the Swedish FA to scrap its ban on foreign-based stars to allow the likes of Hamrin, plus fellow Serie A stars Gunnar Gren and Nils Liedholm, to compete at their World Cup. When he returned, Padova had sold him to Fiorentina.

His crowning achievement with *La Viola* came in 1960-61, when he scored six goals – including the winner against Rangers in the final – in the inaugural European Cup Winners' Cup, and lifted the Coppa Italia. Despite two second-place finishes, he never won Serie A in his nine years at the club – a record he corrected after joining Milan for the 1967-68 season. As well as the *Scudetto*, he lifted another Cup Winners' Cup – scoring twice in the final v Hamburg – in his first season at the San Siro, followed by the European Cup in his second.

That proved to be the final trophy of Hamrin's career, as spells at Napoli and IFK Stockholm yielded no further honours, before retiring in 1972.

Jorge TORO
(1939-2024)

The midfielder was a star of the Chile side that finished third at the 1962 World Cup on home soil, scoring in the infamous "Battle of Santiago" win against Italy.

Jan SORENSEN
(1955-2024)

Denmark striker of 11 caps and part of the Club Brugge side that lost to Liverpool in the 1978 European Cup final. Later went on to manage Walsall.

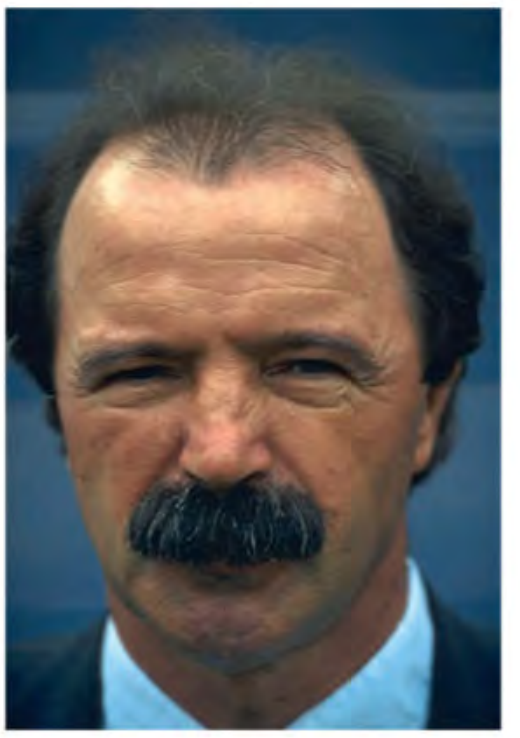
Roland GRIP
(1941-2024)

Sweden defender who won 55 caps and played at the 1970 and 1974 World Cups.

Artur JORGE
(1946-2024)

Porto's coach when they won the European Cup for the first time in 1987, with a reputation for being a football intellectual, who studied German literature in his spare time, and was instantly recognisable with his walrus moustache. A celebrated striker who played at Porto, Academica Coimbra, Benfica (winning four league titles) and Belenenses, he helped found Portugal's players' union and was its first president. He also won 16 caps for his country, often playing alongside Eusebio. His coaching career took in 15 different posts, winning three league titles with Porto and guiding Paris Saint-Germain to the French championship in 1994. He was also national team coach of Portugal, Switzerland and Cameroon. "King Artur", as he was known, was said to watch football on television with jazz or classic music as an accompaniment such was his disdain for the commentators and analysts describing the match.

Mark Gleeson



"Walrus moustache" ...Artur Jorge back in 1995

GOALS we'd like to see again

Our favourite goals from the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations and Asian Cup

Athletic lob... Egypt's Mostafa Mohamed scores against Cape Verde

1 MOSTAFA MOHAMED
Cape Verde 2-2 Egypt
Mohamed's 93rd-minute goal, which combined speed, movement, touch and athleticism, sparked wild celebrations. Unfortunately for the Egyptians, Cape Verde equalised just moments later.

2 HASSAN AL HAYDOS
Qatar 1-0 China
A goal that is often attempted but rarely converted, Al Haydos met a corner perfectly to volley home from the edge of the box. A sublime display of technique.

Thunderous strike...Kevin Pina's goal v Mozambique

3 KEVIN PINA
Cape Verde 3-0 Mozambique
Bebe stole the headlines in this game for his stunning 40-yard free-kick, but Pina's thunderous shot was an arguably even cleaner strike that, unlike Bebe's, left the Mozambique keeper with absolutely no chance.

Goal of the tournament contender...Hassan Al Haydos' volley hits the back of the net v China

4 SEBASTIEN HALLER
Nigeria 1-2 Ivory Coast
The striker showed remarkable improvisation to convert Simon Adingra's cross with the studs of his right boot, an ingenious finish worthy of clinching the trophy for the host nation.

5 NURIDDIN KHAMROKULOV
Tajikistan 2-1 Lebanon
After Parvizdzhon Umarboev's perfectly struck free-kick brought Tajikistan level with their first-ever Asian Cup goal, the tournament debutants sealed their place in the knockout rounds with a looping header from Khamrokulov to spark wild scenes.

6 MUHAMMED SANNEH
Gambia 2-3 Cameroon
If VAR hadn't disallowed this goal, which would have made it 3-3 in a quite astonishing game, there would have been a riot. Quite how Sanneh expected to get away with palming the ball in is anyone's guess, but his audacity is admirable.

7 ARTHUR MASUAKU
DR Congo 3-1 Guinea
Even after a few viewings, we still can't work out whether the ex-West Ham United man was trying to score this wide free-kick or simply mishit his cross.

Textbook free-kick...Son Heung-min celebrates South Korea's win against Australia

8 NIZAR AL RASHDAN
Iraq 2-3 Jordan
Attackers Mousa Al Tamari and Yazan Al Naimat both scored key goals in Jordan's run to the Asian Cup final, but midfielder Al Rashdan's superb winner in the tournament's most dramatic game was our favourite.

9 OUMAR DIAKITE
Mali 1-2 Ivory Coast
Nene Dorgeles' cleanly-struck opener for Mali caught the eye but Diakite's subtle touch to Seko Fofana's scuffed effort stole the show in this one, as ten-man Ivory Coast dramatically won in the dying seconds of extra-time.

10 AKFRAM AFIF
Iran 2-3 Qatar
The electric winger scored eight Asian Cup goals, and the four that weren't penalties were all slick finishes. Delivering in the semi-finals, with an excellent dart inside and emphatic strike, this was the standout.

11 SIDI BOUNA AMAR
Mauritania 2-3 Angola
Mauritania's first-ever AFCON goal from open play was worth the wait, as Bounar Amar rode a series of tackles before lashing home. Their second, a venomous long-range rocket from Aboubakary Koita, wasn't bad either.

12 OMAR KHRBIN
Syria 1-0 India
This goal served as a reminder of just how much international football means, as Syria advanced to the Asian Cup knockouts for the first time in their history to joyous celebrations.

13 JANNICK BUYLA
Equatorial Guinea 4-0 Ivory Coast
Pablo Ganet's free-kick was the pick of the goals here, but the scenes at the end are worth re-watching as a reminder of just how far the hosts sank before rising up again.

14 SON HEUNG-MIN
Australia 1-2 South Korea
We saw a number of high-quality free-kicks across both tournaments. Son's effort in extra-time to take the Taegeuk Warriors into the Asian Cup semi-finals was inch perfect.

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

What does the future hold for Gareth Southgate?

This summer's Euros could be the England manager's international swansong

Two crucial questions have probably been lodged in the back of Gareth Southgate's mind during a winter of reflection and hard thinking. How boldly should his England team play as they chase triumph in the European Championship? And, after eight years as an international team boss, is it time for a new challenge in the maelstrom of club football?

Initial answers to the first question will arrive with spring friendlies against Brazil and Belgium, opponents of the requisite strength for tournament preparation. England supporters want to see their team play on the front foot, tackling high-class sides with confidence rather than caution, with freedom rather than fear.

Southgate has long been criticised, at times unfairly, for being too pragmatic with his team selection, and the strategy for these two matches will tell us much about how England now see themselves: as favourites or as hopefuls.

An answer to the second question is more complicated. The FA are keen for Southgate to remain as England boss beyond Euro 2024 and he has no need to make a firm decision about his future until this summer's tournament is done and dusted.

Wisely, he is keeping his options open. "You've got to see how the summer goes. It's as simple as that," Southgate said at the UEFA Nations League draw in February. But it was clear enough in recent comments that he is considering a switch away from the international arena sometime in the future, and that he feels his England experience makes him a candidate for the biggest jobs in the game.

"There isn't a job in world football that would intimidate or daunt you having lived this one, frankly," he told *Sky Sports News* in December. "You're not going to have any higher profile, you're not going to have any greater pressure. I don't know what the future will be, but I'm very calm about that. I'm not worried about what that might be."

What next for Southgate?...the England boss will be sought after this summer

Southgate's record with England is excellent, reaching a semi-final, final and quarter-final in his three major tournaments, with a superb overall win-rate of 62 per cent.

He has instilled a strong team spirit with England that so many of his predecessors signally failed to do. He has been loyal to players, yet ruthless in judgements when he feels the need. England was seen as an impossible job when he began eight years and 91 matches ago, the team humiliated at Euro 2016 and the supporters severely disaffected. Southgate made it possible.

The truth is that there are no "impossible jobs" in football. It just seems that way at times – as it has for a few years at Manchester United, for example. Top-class managers make these positions look entirely possible, and it would be surprising if Southgate is not being considered as a potential future manager by the new powerbrokers at Old Trafford.

The same applies for another top job that could be well-suited to him in the future, at Newcastle United, but all managerial appointments, of course, are a matter of timing. If they are any future outgoings, would they even fit with Southgate's timescale?

Success with England has undoubtedly made Southgate an attractive option for Premier League giants, but appointing him would represent a mighty gamble, both for the club and for the man himself.

It is 15 years since he was in charge of a club team, which is a vast amount of time away from the manic intensity of life as a Premier League manager. The only one left working now in the Premier League from that 2008-09 season is David Moyes.

For all Southgate's rapport with players, his tactical acumen, his sporting intelligence, his natural diplomacy, his resilience to the pressure and profile of England, adapting to the change of pace at club level is not guaranteed.

There is a good reason why some of the best international managers of recent times have stayed so long in their roles – Joachim Low for 15 years with Germany and Didier Deschamps 12 years and counting with France. One vital factor is success, but another is an acknowledgment of the benefits of the role, that the extreme focus during tournaments is compensated for by significant periods of calm that allow a more natural lifestyle.

Southgate has enjoyed that, and maybe it suits him best.

> "There isn't a job in world football that would intimidate or daunt you having lived this one, frankly"
>
> England manager Gareth Southgate

"I'll be playing for Germany again from March. Why? Because I was asked by the coach and I'm up for it"

Real Madrid midfielder Toni Kroos' announcement on coming out of international retirement for Germany

IN

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

47 Moves That Caught Our Eye This Month

OUT

EUROPE

THOMAS TUCHEL
It was announced that the **Bayern Munich** boss will leave the club at the end of the campaign.

FRANCESCO CALZONA
Napoli hired their former assistant to replace Walter Mazzarri. Calzona will continue in his role as Slovakia coach, leading them at Euro 2024.

JOHN O'SHEA
The ex-Manchester United defender was named interim head coach of **Republic of Ireland**.

JON DAHL TOMASSON
The Dane was appointed **Sweden** coach after leaving Blackburn Rovers by mutual consent.

JOHN EUSTACE
Blackburn hired the ex-Birmingham City boss.

FRANCO FODA
The ex-Austria coach took charge of **Kosovo**.

JEAN-LOUIS GASSET
Just weeks after being fired by Ivory Coast, the 70-year-old became **Marseille**'s third coach of the season, replacing Gennaro Gattuso.

OLIVER GLASNER
Crystal Palace hired the former Eintracht Frankfurt boss to replace Roy Hodgson.

BO HENRIKSEN
Bundesliga strugglers **Mainz** poached the FC Zurich coach after firing Jan Siewert.

INIGO PEREZ
Rayo Vallecano promoted their assistant to head coach after firing Francisco.

FABIO LIVERANI
Salernitana replaced Pippo Inzaghi with Liverani.

DAVIDE BALLARDINI
Serie A strugglers **Sassuolo** fired Alessio Dionisi, replacing him with journeyman coach Ballardini.

NEIL WARNOCK & JUNIOR HOILETT
The veteran manager took interim charge of **Aberdeen**, with Canada's Hoilett his first signing.

JOE HART
The **Celtic** keeper will retire in the summer.

SERGE AURIER & CARLOS VINICIUS
The duo joined **Galatasaray** from Nottingham Forest and Fulham (loan) respectively.

JOE WORRALL & ERNEST MUCI
Besiktas signed the Forest centre-back (loan) and the Albania midfielder from Legia Warsaw.

YOUCEF ATAL
Adana Demirspor signed the Algerian from Nice.

YANN M'VILA
The former Sunderland midfielder joined Championship side **West Bromwich Albion**.

NEIL HARRIS
Millwall re-hired Harris after firing Joe Edwards.

ANDRE BREITENREITER
The German replaced Darren Moore as manager of **Huddersfield Town**.

MICHAEL BEALE
Sunderland fired the former Rangers boss after just two months in charge.

STEFFEN BAUMGART
Hamburg replaced Tim Walter with Baumgart.

ROBERT PROSINECKI
The Croatian became **Montenegro** coach.

PAOLO NICOLATO
After eight years working with Italy's youth teams, Nicolato took charge of **Latvia**.

MAROUANE FELLAINI
The former **Belgium** and Shandong Taishan midfielder announced his retirement.

SOUTH AMERICA

MARQUINHOS
The Arsenal winger joined **Fluminense** on loan.

DAMIAN SUAREZ
Botafogo signed the right-back from Getafe.

AFRICA

AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS EXITS
The exodus of coaches following the AFCON continued with Hubert Velud, Jose Peseiro and Rigobert Song leaving their posts at **Burkina Faso**, **Nigeria** and **Cameroon** respectively.

EMERSE FAE
Fae was handed a permanent contract with **Ivory Coast** after winning AFCON as caretaker.

HOSSAM HASSAN
Hassan was appointed technical director by **Egypt** after Rui Vitoria was sacked as coach.

VLADIMIR PETKOVIC
The former Switzerland boss was announced as Djamel Belmadi's successor at **Algeria**.

ASIA

JESSE LINGARD
South Korean side **FC Seoul** signed the former England and Manchester United midfielder.

JURGEN KLINSMANN
The German was sacked as **South Korea** coach.

TOM SAINTFIET
Philippines hired the ex-Gambia boss as coach.

BRANKO IVANKOVIC
The Croatian took charge of **China** despite failing to win a game at the Asian Cup as Oman boss.

JAROSLAV SILVAHY
Silvahy replaced Ivankovic as **Oman** coach.

GELA SHEKILADZE
The Georgian was promoted from assistant to replace Petar Segrt as **Tajikistan** manager.

SHINJI OKAZAKI
The former **Japan** and Leicester City striker will retire at the end of the campaign.

CONCACAF

HUGO CUYPERS
Major League Soccer outfit **Chicago Fire** paid a club-record $12 million for the Gent striker.

JOSEPH PAINTSIL
MLS spending continued with **LA Galaxy** signing the Ghana winger from Genk for nearly $9m.

AMAHL PELLEGRINO
San Jose Earthquakes snapped up the prolific forward from Norwegian champions Bodo/Glimt.

MATTY LONGSTAFF
Toronto FC signed the ex-Newcastle midfielder.

"Brehme became one of my idols at the World Cup in Italy ...an early, modern defender who played on the right as well as on the left. This also made him a defining part of my career"

Germany's 2014 World Cup-winning captain Philipp Lahm pays tribute to the late Andreas Brehme

OBITUARIES

Chris NICHOLL
(1946-2024)
Northern Ireland international who was a centre-back for Southampton, Aston Villa, Luton Town, Grimsby Town and Halifax Town, notably winning two League Cups with Villa in the 1970s. Later managed Southampton and Walsall and served as assistant coach for Northern Ireland.

Rui RODRIGUES
(1943-2024)
Born in Mozambique, the centre-back went to Portugal and played 12 seasons at Academica Coimbra either side of spells at Benfica and Vitoria Guimaraes. Won 12 caps for Portugal.

Mark Gleeson

Norin BETANI
(1999-2024)
Zambia Women's international who died just days before her team played Ghana in an Olympic Games qualifier. The Indeni Roses striker had been named in the national squad for the two-legged tie and was in the training camp, but was rushed to hospital and passed away.

Mark Gleeson

Miguel ANGEL
(1947-2024)
Real Madrid's keeper during the 1970s and 1980s, winning six La Liga titles and seven cups, as well as the 1984-85 UEFA Cup and 1975-76 Zamora Trophy as Spain's best goalkeeper.

Giacomo LOSI
(1935-2024)
A one-club player who spent his entire 14-year career with Roma, right-back Losi held the club's appearance record until being overtaken by Francesco Totti. Played for Italy at the 1962 World Cup.

Ulrik LE FEVRE
(1946-2024)
A Denmark international and league title winner in the 1970s with Borussia Monchengladbach, Club Brugge and in his home country with Vejle BK.

Paul BRADSHAW
(1956-2024)
Former goalkeeper and England U21 international who played 243 games for Wolves between 1977 and 1983. Also played for Blackburn, Vancouver Whitecaps, West Brom, Bristol Rovers, Newport County and Peterborough.

Eddie MITCHELL
(1954-2024)
Former Bournemouth chairman who helped kick-start the club's rise from League Two to the Premier League.

Stan BOWLES
(1948-2024)
A true Queens Park Rangers icon, with one of the stands at Loftus Road named after him. Born in Manchester, Bowles' career began in northwest England at Manchester City, Bury, Crewe Alexandra and Carlisle United, before he arrived in West London in 1972. With 96 goals in 315 appearances, Bowles is QPR's sixth-highest goalscorer of all time, but he is more fondly remembered for the entertaining manner in which he played.

"Stanley Bowles is undoubtedly one of the greatest players to have ever pulled on the famous blue and white hoops. Many would argue that he is the best," said a club statement. "Regardless, Stan was a special talent – a 1970s footballing maverick – who was popular for his antics both on and off the field."

Final England appearance... Bowles in action at Wembley v the Netherlands in 1977

He left the R's for Nottingham Forest in 1979, before joining Leyton Orient and ending his professional career at Brentford. He won five England caps between 1974 and 1977, scoring once.

Andreas BREHME
(1960-2024)
An energetic, all-action and versatile left-back, Brehme could play anywhere across the defence and even in midfield.

He scored eight international goals in 86 appearances – five of which came at World Cups and European Championships – and none proved more important than West Germany's winner against Argentina in the 1990 World Cup final. Brehme had already played a major part in taking his country to the final, having scored against the Netherlands in the quarter-finals and England in the semis, and his exploits in Italy that summer saw him finish third in that year's Ballon d'Or votes.

By then, Brehme had already won league titles with both Bayern Munich and Internazionale. In Italy, he played alongside German team-mates Lothar Matthaus and Jurgen Klinsmann, and in 1989 was named Serie A Player of the Year in spite of his two compatriots and Diego Maradona, who was at Napoli.

Before that, Brehme originally made his name at Kaiserslautern and returned to the club in 1993, helping them win the German Cup and the Bundesliga title before retiring in 1998.

An ambidextrous player, Brehme is notable for scoring World Cup penalties with both feet – the Italia '90 final winner with his right, and in the quarter-final penalty-shootout victory over the hosts at Mexico '86 with his left.

German legend... Andreas Brehme

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

JANUARY 2024

SEASON RANKINGS
Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Yann Sommer (Internazionale)	16
Wojciech Szczesny (Juventus)	8
Marcin Bulka (Nice)	6
Lukas Hradecky (Bayer Leverkusen)	6
Alisson (Liverpool)	4
Kepa Arrizabalaga (Real Madrid)	1
Lucas Chevalier (Lille)	1
Ederson (Manchester City)	1
Paulo Gazzaniga (Girona)	1
Kamil Grabara (Copenhagen)	1
Gregor Kobel (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Mike Maignan (Milan)	1
Emiliano Martinez (Aston Villa)	1
Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich)	1
Jan Oblak (Atletico Madrid)	1
Andre Onana (Manchester United)	1
Ivan Provedel (Lazio)	1
Marc-Andre ter Stegen (Barcelona)	1

DEFENDERS

Alex Grimaldo (Bayer Leverkusen)	21
Virgil van Dijk (Liverpool)	14
Trent Alexander-Arnold (Liverpool)	13
Dani Carvajal (Real Madrid)	13
Jonathan Tah (Bayer Leverkusen)	11
Jeremie Frimpong (Bayer Leverkusen)	9
Bremer (Juventus)	8
Federico Dimarco (Internazionale)	7
Antonio Rudiger (Real Madrid)	7
Kyle Walker (Manchester City)	7
Josko Gvardiol (Manchester City)	5
Piero Hincapie (Bayer Leverkusen)	4
Cristian Romero (Tottenham Hotspur)	4
Jean-Clair Todibo (Nice)	4
Micky van de Ven (Tottenham Hotspur)	4
Francesco Acerbi (Internazionale)	3
Alessandro Bastoni (Internazionale)	3
Joao Cancelo (Barcelona)	3
Alphonso Davies (Bayern Munich)	3
Gabriel (Arsenal)	3
Federico Gatti (Juventus)	3
Achraf Hakimi (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Mats Hummels (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Odilon Kossounou (Bayer Leverkusen)	3
Benjamin Pavard (Internazionale)	3
Ben White (Arsenal)	3
Ronald Araujo (Barcelona)	2
Conor Bradley (Liverpool)	2
Yan Couto (Girona)	2
Dante (Nice)	2
Stefan de Vrij (Internazionale)	2
Ruben Dias (Manchester City)	2
Denzel Dumfries (Internazionale)	2
Mario Hermoso (Atletico Madrid)	2
Arthur Masuaku (Besiktas)	2
Nicolas Otamendi (Benfica)	2
William Saliba (Arsenal)	2
Kieran Trippier (Newcastle United)	2
Dayot Upamecano (Bayern Munich)	2
Axel Witsel (Atletico Madrid)	2
Nathan Ake (Manchester City)	1
David Alaba (Real Madrid)	1
Waldemar Anton (Stuttgart)	1
Sam Beukema (Bologna)	1
Daley Blind (Girona)	1
Olivier Boscagli (PSV)	1
Andreas Christensen (Barcelona)	1
Sebastian Coates (Sporting)	1
Danilo (Juventus)	1
Oscar De Marcos (Athletic Club)	1
Eric Garcia (Girona)	1
Miguel Gutierrez (Girona)	1
Goncalo Inacio (Sporting)	1
Jules Kounde (Barcelona)	1
Tino Livramento (Newcastle United)	1
Koki Machida (Union Saint-Gilloise)	1
Nahuel Molina (Atletico Madrid)	1
Luca Ranieri (Fiorentina)	1
David Raum (RB Leipzig)	1
Nico Schlotterbeck (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Niklas Sule (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Edmond Tapsoba (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Filippo Terracciano (Milan)	1
Jordan Teze (PSV)	1
Fikayo Tomori (Milan)	1
Destiny Udogie (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Leny Yoro (Lille)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Jude Bellingham (Real Madrid)	37
Rodri (Manchester City)	12
James Maddison (Tottenham Hotspur)	9
Florian Wirtz (Bayer Leverkusen)	9
Hakan Calhanoglu (Internazionale)	7
Toni Kroos (Real Madrid)	6
Martin Odegaard (Arsenal)	6
Jamal Musiala (Bayern Munich)	4
Dominik Szoboszlai (Liverpool)	4
Phil Foden (Manchester City)	3
Adrien Rabiot (Juventus)	3
Declan Rice (Arsenal)	3
Vitinha (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Granit Xhaka (Bayer Leverkusen)	3
Aleix Garcia (Girona)	2
Yangel Herrera (Girona)	2
Curtis Jones (Liverpool)	2
Douglas Luiz (Aston Villa)	2
John McGinn (Aston Villa)	2
Henrikh Mkhitaryan (Internazionale)	2
Ismael Saibari (PSV)	2
Bernardo Silva (Manchester City)	2
Joey Veerman (PSV)	2
Nicolo Barella (Internazionale)	1
Giacomo Bonaventura (Fiorentina)	1
Kevin De Bruyne (Manchester City)	1
Rodrigo De Paul (Atletico Madrid)	1
Thomas Delaney (Anderlecht)	1
Wataru Endo (Liverpool)	1
Rasmus Falk (Copenhagen)	1
Chris Fuhrich (Stuttgart)	1
Gavi (Barcelona)	1
Pedro Goncalves (Sporting)	1
Isco (Real Betis)	1
Joshua Kimmich (Bayern Munich)	1

Teun Koopmeiners (Atalanta)	1
Takefusa Kubo (Real Sociedad)	1
Mohammed Kudus (West Ham United)	1
Enzo Le Fee (Rennes)	1
Ruben Loftus-Cheek (Milan)	1
Ivan Martin (Girona)	1
Weston McKennie (Juventus)	1
Scott McTominay (Manchester United)	1
Kaoru Mitoma (Brighton & Hove Albion)	1
Cole Palmer (Chelsea)	1
Lucas Paqueta (West Ham United)	1
Tijjani Reijnders (Milan)	1
Rodrigo Riquelme (Atletico Madrid)	1
Marcel Sabitzer (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Xavi Simons (RB Leipzig)	1
Federico Valverde (Real Madrid)	1
Warren Zaire-Emery (Paris Saint-Germain)	1

FORWARDS

Harry Kane (Bayern Munich)	28
Lautaro Martinez (Internazionale)	18
Erling Haaland (Manchester City)	13
Kylian Mbappe (Paris Saint-Germain)	13
Serhou Guirassy (Stuttgart)	9
Rodrygo (Real Madrid)	9
Mohamed Salah (Liverpool)	9
Son Heung-min (Tottenham Hotspur)	8
Artem Dovbyk (Girona)	7
Antoine Griezmann (Atletico Madrid)	6
Victor Boniface (Bayer Leverkusen)	5
Viktor Gyokeres (Sporting)	5
Vinicius Junior (Real Madrid)	5
Alvaro Morata (Atletico Madrid)	4
Julian Alvarez (Manchester City)	2
Jeremy Doku (Manchester City)	2
Evanilson (Porto)	2
Santiago Gimenez (Feyenoord)	2
Diogo Jota (Liverpool)	2
Leroy Sane (Bayern Munich)	2
Dusan Vlahovic (Juventus)	2
Jarrod Bowen (West Ham United)	1
Memphis Depay (Atletico Madrid)	1
Luis Diaz (Liverpool)	1
Edin Dzeko (Fenerbahce)	1
Niclas Fullkrug (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Mauro Icardi (Galatasaray)	1
Romelu Lukaku (Roma)	1
Bukayo Saka (Arsenal)	1
Savio (Girona)	1
Patrik Schick (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Dominic Solanke (Bournemouth)	1
Marcus Thuram (Internazionale)	1
Ayase Ueda (Feyenoord)	1
Deniz Undav (Stuttgart)	1

ESM MEMBERS: *A Bola* (Portugal), *Fanatik* (Turkey), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Germany), *La Gazzetta dello Sport* (Italy), *Kicker* (Germany), *Marca* (Spain), *Nemzeti Sport* (Hungary), *Sport/Foot* (Belgium), *De Telegraaf* (Netherlands), *Tipsbladet* (Denmark), *ELF Voetbal* (Netherlands), *World Soccer* (England)

eye witness

Juraj Vrdoljak reports

CROATIA

Captain America and the comeback kids

Hajduk Split are chasing an historic league title with a mix of youth and experience

Barely anyone in Split, never mind the rest of Croatia, would have believed you back in May 2005 if you'd told them that they would have to wait (at least) another 19 years to see Hajduk, a true Croatian powerhouse, win another league title.

In that time, not only have they failed to spring a single legitimate title race with their arch-rivals Dinamo Zagreb – who have won 17 of the subsequent 18 league titles – but they even came on the verge of bankruptcy, twice, only to be saved from the very brink by their huge fanbase.

Last time Hajduk were crowned Croatian champions, stars like Nikola Kalinic and Ivan Perisic were both still part of the club's academy. Kalinic did rack up just under 80 appearances for the club, before moving to Blackburn Rovers in 2009, but Perisic never made his full debut for his childhood team, joining French side Sochaux a year after that 2004-05 title-winning campaign aged 16.

Now, the pair are reunited back home after long and prosperous careers, which include European titles, spells at clubs like Borussia Dortmund, Milan, Internazionale, Bayern Munich, Atletico Madrid, Tottenham Hotspur and others, and, in Perisic's case, even a goal in the World Cup final. The thought of ending these years of hurt for Hajduk is the one thing left remaining for them, perhaps also as redemption for having left the club so early. News of the duo signing €1 contracts with ▸

Loyal support...Hajduk fans watch their U19s in last season's UEFA Youth League final

the club – in Kalinic's case re-joining for the third time after leaving in the summer following a second spell – quickly went viral worldwide all over social media.

But while the rest of the world focused on the returning heroes, for locals it was another Hajduk player that was stealing headlines: American-born midfielder Rokas Pukstas.

A home defeat to Adriatic rivals and fellow title challengers Rijeka in the first game after the winter break delivered a dent to Hajduk's ambitions, especially after a largely underwhelming performance in front of a sold-out Poljud Stadium. But not for a lack of effort from Pukstas, who had to leave the pitch three times to get his shirt – drenched with blood after a collision – replaced. He didn't even flinch, and neither did the crowd. That's "Bro" for you, a nickname this young American – born into a Lithuanian family who arrived in the US through a scholarship – got after a viral video of him saying: "Less talk, more work, bro" heavily amused the fans in Split.

His mum and dad flew overseas from Lithuania as talented athletes (his father, Mindaugas, was a marathon runner at the 2004 Olympics), in search of better training conditions in the US, eventually settling in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Like them, Rokas decided he should also seek his sporting career overseas – albeit in the opposite direction. When the word of a talented 16-year-old first reached Poljud, Hajduk gave Pukstas a trial. First impressions were mixed: although he seemed to lack the requisite technical abilities, that was overcome by his tireless work ethic and sturdy physique, especially for one so young.

Another thing that stood out in the teenager's style of play was his positioning, stemming from his high intelligence. On the teamsheet, he's nominally a winger, but on the pitch he's anything that's required. He even started as a wing-back in the UEFA Youth League knockout stage game against Atletico Madrid in 2022, having a goal disallowed in the process. But his biggest strength lies in his spatial awareness, surging in from behind to wreak havoc between the opposition's defensive lines. Last season, Milan's youth team learned that the hard way after Pukstas headed Hajduk's Under-19s past the Italian giants and into the UEFA Youth League final. Although they went on to lose to AZ, it was an historic achievement watched on by thousands of Hajduk fans that flocked to Geneva to back their talented youngsters (also including centre-back Luka Vuskovic, the teenager that Tottenham have paid £12 million for and who will move to North London in 2025). For Rokas, this was further confirmation he was at the right place.

More importantly, his two goals for the senior side at the beginning of the current season immediately set the tone for the title race. After another of his headers brought Dinamo to their knees in the dying seconds of the first Eternal Derby of the season, making it a 2-1 win for Hajduk, he followed that up with another decisive goal against Rijeka in the next match. When asked by the club's TV channel for his comments on the game, he just looked back with a dead stare and said: "Well, I'll need to re-watch the game to see if I did any good".

As you might have imagined, his big breakthrough has not gone unnoticed. Scouts of various Premier League sides, reportedly including Arsenal, have already attended Poljud to cast an eye over the young talent. The fact that he was part of the United States squad at the Under-20 World Cup last summer, and remains intent on making the senior roster for the 2026 senior finals on home soil, will only make the hype bigger.

Hajduk fans cherish their "Captain America" – another nickname given to Pukstas in Split – not only for his brilliant talent and the results that it is producing, but also because he's been credited for doing the unimaginable: changing

"Captain America"... Rokas Pukstas during last season's UEFA Youth League

> Pukstas is the team's poster boy and leader, even in a team filled with such experienced superstars

Homecoming...Nikola Kalinic proudly dons the shirt, while Josip Brekalo is greeted by Ivan Perisic on his arrival at Hajduk
Credit: Instagram @hnkhajduk

the whole youth culture at the club, which was previously based on a rather hard-headed but also, at times, very lenient approach in talent development. The term "*nasa dica*" (our kids), also coined by Hajduk fans, reflects the club's identity where the team leaders should be local players, born and bred in the football-crazed city with the capacity to understand the pressure and heavy burden of expectations. In reality, many fail to cope with this; a lot of academy graduates rely solely on their natural talent – especially to help break into the first team initially – but then often fail to make the next step, wilting under the intense pressure.

That familiar narrative appeared to rear its ugly head in January, with that home defeat to Rijeka. For Hajduk fans the longer the wait, the less patience they have for any slip. They watched with agony as their team threw away a one-goal lead – given to them by Pukstas – to lose 2-1, despite Kalinic making his third debut for the club in the final 13 minutes.

The southern, fiery atmosphere that makes Split one of the most interesting football cities in the Balkans is often a blessing and a curse. Ahead of the game, a huge tifo was unfurled over the Poljud's north stand – home of Torcida, the oldest organised Ultras group in Europe – saying: "Jesus in the heavens, help the white jersey." Perhaps even the Almighty thought that Hajduk shouldn't need divine intervention to overcome Rijeka, but the brave guests from the north of the Adriatic coast proved everyone wrong and leapfrogged Hajduk into top spot.

Stunned into silence, the Poljud faithful needed to see a response, and fast. In the very next game there, Kalinic and Josip Brekalo – another Croatia international who sensationally came in on loan, joining from Fiorentina after his planned return to Dinamo Zagreb surprisingly collapsed – proved their worth in a 4-0 thrashing of Slaven Belupo. Kalinic broke the deadlock with a spectacular bicycle kick just before half-time, while Brekalo scored one and created another on his home debut, before going on to add two more assists in his next three games.

As for Perisic, he arrived with a knee injury, but his comeback is getting closer and closer judging from the videos of hard workouts posted on his Instagram account. Supporters hope he will make his full return by the end of March, when their season could well be decided: at the end of the month they face Dinamo, now hot on their heels, before visiting Rijeka a week later.

Until then, it's Pukstas who is the team's poster boy and leader, even in a team filled with such experienced superstars. Photos of him covered in blood dominated the front covers after that Rijeka defeat: it was seen as a symbol of that hard Hajduk fight to finally end all of these years of hurt.

Pukstas arrived as a kid from a completely different culture, far away from the heated Mediterranean surroundings, and completely worked his way up by improving himself day by day. And when he got the opportunity, he took it with both hands: his resilience is a feat from which even the senior players could learn a thing or two. The likes of Kalinic, Perisic and the rest of the old guard of *nasa dica* may have returned to fulfil their one last childhood dream, but it is their beloved Captain America who has already built his lasting legacy in Split, regardless of the final outcome this season.

Youth League... Pukstas and his young team-mates celebrate during their victory against Milan

SPAIN

Unionistas de Salamanca: the people's club

How supporters of UD Salamanca rebuilt a football club from scratch

On a cold January evening in northwest Spain, fantasy threatened to become reality. For 15 surreal minutes, Barcelona – 27-time La Liga champions and five-time conquerors of Europe – trailed Unionistas de Salamanca in the last 16 of the Copa del Rey. Against the club of Cruyff, Guardiola and Messi, hometown lad Alvaro Gomez slammed home an emphatic volley to send the 6,000-strong crowd into raptures.

The team from Spanish football's third tier eventually lost 3-1, but the scalps they claimed during their cup run showed that another kind of football is possible. Unionistas is a club entirely owned by its fans, one of a growing number around Europe that are fighting for the soul of the game at a time when it has never been more threatened. How the club got to this point is nothing short of remarkable.

For 90 years, Salamanca – a World Heritage Site boasting one of Europe's oldest universities – was represented by Union Deportiva Salamanca (UDS), a club that bounced between the second and third tiers and spent just 12 seasons in the top flight. In line with new legislation, an SAD (*sociedad anónima deportiva*, a public limited sports company) was set up in 1990 to run the club as a business. SADs were introduced to improve financial management and transparency in clubs, but as a result it often ripped power away from fans. In 2013, thousands of loyal supporters were left with nothing when the club was liquidated after amassing debts of €23 million.

So, what do you do when a near century of history, tradition and friendship suddenly disappears? A group of bereaved supporters took matters into their own hands and formed a new club. As the "In Memoriam UDS 1923-2013" slogan on the club badge suggests, Unionistas is a "tribute" team: never to replace or pretend to be UDS, but to honour its memory. The club is entirely owned by its supporters and operates a one-member, one-vote system, meaning each of the near 4,900 paying members has an equal say in how the club is run and on matters including kit designs and charity initiatives.

Unlike La Liga's four fan-owned clubs – Real Madrid, Barcelona, Athletic Club Bilbao and Osasuna – it's a level playing field. There's no multi-million euro buy-in needed to run for the presidency or to become a board member. Those roles are voluntary, with members voting in elections every three years. "All of us are part of one big family, we've never felt that some people are more important

RIGHT: Fan-owned ...Unionistas de Salamanca supporters cheer on their team *Credit: Manu Laya*

BELOW: Fantasy football ...Unionistas fans celebrate taking the lead against Barcelona in the Copa del Rey

than the rest of us", says Peter Murphy, a British club member who has lived in Salamanca for almost 40 years. "At the beginning, everyone told us that we were a pub team, and they imagined we would have a very short history. Little did they know..."

Little did they know indeed. In ten years, Unionistas have risen from the amateur sixth tier of Spanish football to the third, an upward trajectory that has been meteoric but fully organic. The club flew out of the blocks after starting play in 2014, easing to back-to-back league titles to reach the fourth division by 2016 and then the third in 2018. However, the harsh reality of being a fan-owned club in the modern age soon set in as fallen giants, B-teams of top-flight clubs and sides with big backers became regular opponents. Unionistas have a smaller budget than practically every side in the RFEF Primera Federacion, but they have the advantage of being a true community club.

Cup clash...a half and half scarf in the crowd

The local community does its bit to help the team, with many local businesses sponsoring the club. When COVID-19 restrictions prevented fans from attending games, members still purchased season tickets. Fans have even funded players' signing-on fees out of their own pockets. In 2022, Unionistas had to find €300,000 when the local council refused to fund the conversion of the municipal stadium pitch from artificial turf to grass. Faced with administrative

Home ground... Unionistas' Reina Sofia Stadium

relegation for failing to meet league requirements, club members raised €450,000 in less than a week.

"People have approached us with interest in investing," says the club's former president Miguel Angel Sandoval, "but our philosophy is very clear: that of demonstrating that another type of football is possible and that members feel that they are the owners. We don't allow sponsors to participate in important decisions. We are not going to sell the club for a dream."

Unionistas is a club for everyone, a place where people can meet and support their team regardless of race, gender, sex and social background. "It's about more than football," says Juanjo Rodrigo, one of the founding members of the club. "We do things for the city and the people, like collecting toys for children from disadvantaged families. Over 20,000 people have left Salamanca in the last 20 years for Madrid or the Basque Country because there isn't much work. We try to help people so that they don't have to leave."

THE OTHER CLUB

When UDS folded, the supporters that formed Unionistas took inspiration from the likes of FC United of Manchester and AFC Wimbledon by embracing fan-ownership. But not everyone did. Some fans adopted the club's B team, Salmantino, claiming it to be a direct continuation of UDS. However, in 2015, after two seasons of playing in the fourth tier, they were relegated to the level that Unionistas had to start from after it was ruled that Salmantino was in fact a new club.

There is a lot of bad blood between the two clubs. Salmantino – now known as Salamanca CF UDS, its third different name in ten years – claims ownership of the UDS badge and hymn. They also play at UDS' old Helmantico Stadium after a mysterious Mexican investment group outbid Unionistas by €1 million.

Salamanca CF UDS represents the polar opposite of fan ownership, and it provides Unionistas fans with a painful daily reminder of what they lost. "It hurts," admits Unionistas club president Roberto Pescador. "If they were the old club then we would not exist, because there is nothing we love more in football than the old club. You can never take UDS from my heart." In the 23rd minute of every match, Unionistas supporters sing the UDS hymn. It's part tribute to their first love, part defiant reclamation of something they feel others are trying to weaponise. Legal proceedings regarding the UDS badge and hymn are ongoing.

> "Just because we're fan-owned doesn't mean we can't be professional"
>
> Unionistas de Salamanca club president Roberto Pescador

STAYING COMPETITIVE

As one of the pioneers of *futbol popular* – the name for the fan-ownership movement in Spain – club president Pescador is often asked how Unionistas stay competitive in an age of state ownership and rabid commercialisation in football. "There's always been a misunderstanding – people think because the club is run by fans, it operates in an amateurish way, and that no one can earn money from that", Pescador tells *World Soccer*. "Just because we're fan-owned doesn't mean we can't be professional."

With a limited budget to play with, Pescador and sporting director Ruben Andres have leaned on the club's unique selling points. Unionistas have made a name for themselves with their giant-killing cup exploits over the years – in 2019-20 they beat Deportivo La Coruna on penalties to earn a round of 32 home tie against a Real Madrid side that featured the likes of Gareth Bale, Karim Benzema and Vinicius Junior – while the chance to play in front of large crowds often convinces players to drop down from higher divisions.

"It was a blast to play every week, home and away," says Oskar Martin, a Basque attacker who played for the club between 2016 and 2018. "The fans didn't stop encouraging, they made you give 100 per cent. They are the main driving force of the club. Even in the fourth division, they make you feel like a true footballer and you notice the affection they transmit to you."

THE FUTURE

Fan-ownership has its sceptics, but Unionistas are showing that it can work. Over the last six years, Unionistas have consolidated themselves as a third-tier side, and this season have an outside chance of making the promotion play-offs. The 2023-24 campaign will forever be remembered for the remarkable cup run that saw Dani Ponz's side beat second-tier Sporting Gijon 2-0 and then eliminate 2021-22 Champions

Cup run...Unionistas pose for a photo after beating Sporting Gijon in the Copa del Rey *Credit: Manu Laya*

League semi-finalists Villarreal on penalties to set up the tie with Barcelona. It's been some rise from the muddy pitches of Castilla y Leon to facing European royalty, but nobody at the club wants to stop there.

"We need to have our feet on the ground and understand that it's not going to be easy," says Pescador. "The aim has to be promotion, because the aim always has to be to grow and prove that this model can survive and thrive in professional football."

Boosted by widespread coverage of the Barca match, Unionistas have gained hundreds of new members and thousands of new social media followers this season, while ticket sales have soared to unprecedented levels. As the European Super League project threatens to rip out what remains of football's soul, from Salamanca, the gospel of fan-owned football is being spread far and wide.

"There is no better thing than having your own club and being the owners of your own destiny," says Pescador. "It's like what William Henley wrote in *Invictus*: 'I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul'. You have to be the master of your club." Football is a competitive game, but as any member of a fan-owned club will tell you, controlling your own destiny is more important than any win, loss or draw.

FUTBOL POPULAR

Though Unionistas are the most successful example of fan-owned football in Spain, the *futbol popular* movement continues to grow every year as more supporters look to take back control of their clubs. Atletico Club de Socios are credited with kick-starting the movement in 2007, formed by a group of Atletico Madrid fans disillusioned with the management of Enrique Cerezo and Jesus Gil and the increasing commercialisation of their club.

Many clubs have been founded across Spain in the years since, each with different motives behind their formation. The likes of SD Logrones, UD Ourense and Xerez Deportivo FC were established by supporters of historic clubs that had either entered bankruptcy, were dissolved or demoted, while others like Union Club de Ceares became fan-owned through successful campaigns and elections.

CAP Ciudad de Murcia's story has parallels with AFC Wimbledon: after a new owner relocated their original club, CF Ciudad de Murcia, 270 kilometres southwest to Granada, supporters formed a new club in 2010. Similarly, in 2020, CD Cuenca Mestallistes 1925 began to attract Valencia supporters unwilling to support Peter Lim's ownership of their club any longer.

***Futbol Popular*...Unionistas de Salamanca fans stand for the club's anthem** *Credit: Manu Laya*

THE SURVIVOR

How Sebastien Haller became an AFCON icon just over a year after recovering from testicular cancer

Words: Nick Bidwell

Confederation conqueror, cult figure for the Ivory Coast nation, a proven source of goals as well as selflessness, and a beacon of hope for all those who have had their lives turned upside down by a chilling medical discovery – what a life-affirming journey Borussia Dortmund striker Sebastien Haller has been on over the past 18 months, going from a testicular cancer diagnosis in the summer of 2022 to flicking home a late winning goal for the Ivorians in their recent AFCON final on home soil against Nigeria.

A player and man blessed with an unbreakable spirit, Haller naturally found it hard to contain his emotions at the final whistle. "It feels good," he told the former French international centre-back turned *beIN Sports* reporter Basile Boli. "It feels good to be rewarded a little. To have the benefit of continuing to believe." Noticing the tears welling up in Haller's eyes, Boli duly began to sob himself, the two men ending up in a sympathetic embrace.

Not so long ago, Haller, 29, appeared distinctly unlikely to even be included in the Ivorian squad for the African main event. He had spent most of the first half of the 2023-24 campaign on the Dortmund bench, losing his place in the starting line-up to the newly-acquired Niclas Fullkrug. With only four competitive starts for the *Schwarz-Gelben* prior to the winter break, Haller was alarmingly short of match practice and to further complicate matters his ankle was giving him hell.

The Ivorians picked him nevertheless, and despite not being fit enough to make a contribution in their near-disastrous group phase – losing two of their three games, sacking head coach Jean-Louis Gasset following a 4-0 thumping by Equatorial Guinea and only qualifying for the last 16 as a lucky loser – he would come good in the knockout rounds. A second-half substitute in the round of 16 tie with Senegal, he calmly converted his penalty kick in the shootout victory, did a good job of leading the line after another substitute appearance in the quarter-final clash with Mali, then volleyed home the only goal of the game in the semi-final victory over the Democratic Republic of Congo, a tasty appetiser to his main course heroics in the final.

"One of my personal goals at these African Championships was to give everything I had," he explained in the same *beIN Sports* interview. "It was my good fortune to be selected even though my fitness was in doubt. When I picked up this ankle injury [in late December 2023], it was supposed to keep me out for six to eight weeks. It might well have been the case that the final was my one and only appearance of the tournament. The ankle is still a problem for me but it was worth giving it a go. My team-mates encouraged me to stay on

Ivory Coast hero... Haller celebrates after scoring in the AFCON semi-final

the pitch as long as possible. If I scored, it's thanks to them. I had to set an example, give maximum effort to bring the cup home."

For both the Ivorian squad and Haller himself, this was a triumph against the odds, the same improbable destiny. Haller successfully seeing off cancer and Ivory Coast miraculously navigating the path to Cup of Nations glory, beating Mali with ten men and coming from behind to win three knockout games.

Haller was very much a latecomer to the ranks of *Les Elephants*, only winning his first full cap for them in November 2020 at the relatively advanced age of 26. The son of an Ivorian mother and French father, he was born and raised in the Parisian suburb of Ris-Orangis and was good enough in his youth to win representative honours for France from the Under-16s through to the Under-21s – even taking on Ivory Coast for the latter.

A graduate of the prolific Auxerre academy, he played for France at the Under-17 World Cup in Mexico in 2011 – where his team-mates included former Manchester City defenders Aymeric Laporte and Benjamin Mendy, West Ham United centre-back Kurt Zouma, and goalkeeper Lionel Mpasi, who has since become a full international for the Democratic Republic of Congo and was left bamboozled by Haller's languid volley which found the net in the AFCON semi-final.

> "It might well have been the case that the final was my one and only appearance of the tournament"
>
> **Haller on playing at the AFCON with an ankle injury**

He was extremely productive too for the French Under-21s, netting 13 goals in 20 appearances. His most memorable moment at that level? Probably the hat-trick he scored in November 2016 in a 5-1 victory over the Ivory Coast. That friendly turned out to be his penultimate run-out with the U21s and sadly for him, his dream of making the senior side never got off the ground.

As late as 2019, while starring for Eintracht Frankfurt, he continued to insist to the media that he had not given up hope of taking over from Olivier Giroud at the point of the French attack. A year later, he would be singing another tune, opting to nail his colours to Ivory Coast's mast.

Match-winner... Haller scores a volley against DR Congo

"I have dual nationality and Ivory Coast had been trying to win me over for some time," he told *Radio Monte Carlo*. "Of course, if I'd been picked for France at 22 or 23, I wouldn't be where I am now. Ultimately, I chose Ivory Coast because they made me feel wanted. I was keen to be a leading player for them, to write some history."

That Haller is now an ambassador for testicular cancer awareness should come as no surprise. From the day of his diagnosis, shortly after joining Dortmund from Ajax in a €31 million deal, to the successful culmination of his treatment four months later, he proved the perfect patient. Calm, stoical and resilient as he underwent two operations and four debilitating courses of chemotherapy. Deemed cancer-free at the end of November 2022, he received the green light to resume training with the Dortmund first team early in January and soon was catching the eye in the Bundesliga, racking up nine goals and five assists in the Spring Championship.

Hands on the trophy ...Haller after the AFCON final

A key factor as Dortmund chased down, then supplanted Bayern Munich in pole position in the table, a fairy-tale ending to months of torment was within his reach, only for the Ruhr club to self-destruct on the final weekend of the season, their 2-2 home draw with Mainz enabling Bayern Munich to pip them to the finishing line. Haller missed a penalty in the first half of the Mainz debacle and it remains a sore point.

"That title near-miss caused me more suffering than the news that I had cancer," he declared in the *Bild* tabloid. "When you're ill, there's nothing you can do. You have to accept it and look to recover. We had the title in our hands and controlled our destiny."

Rolling with the punches has been a way of life for Haller throughout his career. In his 18 months in England with West Ham United, who he joined for a whopping £45m from Eintracht

Frankfurt in the summer of 2019, he only rarely did himself justice, scoring just ten Premier League goals, including a spectacular acrobatic overhead kick versus Crystal Palace. His move to the East End of London was one of mutually assured destruction. More often than not, he appeared ill at ease with the intensity of the English top flight, while Hammers boss David Moyes, who returned to the club as manager five months after Haller's arrival, clearly did not rate him.

Haller is at his best with co-attackers in close proximity; Moyes' preferred lone striker system left him far too isolated and it was only a matter of time before the Hammers cut their losses, selling him to Ajax for £22m – less than half what they paid for him.

If West Ham was a nightmare writ large, his season-and-a-half in Ajax colours – where he would be reunited with his former Utrecht coach Erik ten Hag – was exactly the opposite, packed with goals and plaudits. Indeed, he could not stop scoring, contributing 13 to the conquest of a league and cup double in 2020-21 having arrived in January, topping the Eredivisie marksmanship charts the following campaign with 21 goals, and putting together an outstanding sequence of finishing in the 2021-22 Champions League: 11 goals in all, including a four-goal salvo in a 5-1 group phase win over Sporting in Lisbon.

Only once did he have cause to feel frustrated at the Amsterdam Arena, rendered ineligible for the knockout stages of the 2020-21 Europa League campaign when an Ajax administrator forgot to list him in the club's squad. Ajax's appeal to UEFA would fall on deaf ears. "It was just a series of human errors," explained Haller to *So Foot* magazine. "Someone forgot to click on the form. The rules are the rules and whether you are called Ajax or not, UEFA do not do favours for anyone."

> "That title near-miss caused me more suffering than the news that I had cancer"
>
> **Haller on missing out on last season's Bundesliga title**

His seven-year spell with Auxerre also had its difficulties, particularly in his early days as a professional in the second division. Despite establishing himself as a regular in the France Under-21 set-up, he was often left out of the Auxerre first team by coach Jean-Luc Vannuchi, spending much of 2014 out in the cold. Vannuchi wanted a striker who would run in behind and spark counter-attacks. Haller, all technique and impeccable instincts in the box, just did not fit the bill.

Starved of senior action, he had no other choice but to leave and by the end of that year he had signed on the dotted line for Dutch outfit Utrecht, whose French chief scout Didier Martel knew the Gallic scene like the back of his hand.

Utrecht certainly was a dream move for him. He settled in quickly and, in his first six months, achieved the more than decent return of 11 goals and five assists in just 17 games. In the summer of 2015, a coach by the name of Erik ten Hag took over as Utrecht coach and his attack-conscious approach turned out to be the ideal platform for "Seb", who not only scored 17 Eredivisie goals that season but also scooped the club's Player of the Year award.

"At Utrecht, we used a really high press and that played a big part in my development. In the Netherlands I was much more involved in the game. I became more focused and active on the pitch. In Ligue 2 with Auxerre, you could wait ten minutes for the ball to come to you and then not see it for the next half-hour. At Utrecht, I was out of my comfort zone. I had to get

Dual nationality...Haller in action for France Under-21s against Ivory Coast in 2016

on with it and work."

The moral of the Haller story is that any coach who places faith in him derives great benefit. Ten Hag implicitly trusted him at Utrecht and Ajax, and so did Eintracht Frankfurt boss Adi Hutter, who had Haller under his wing in 2018-19. A most memorable season saw Frankfurt's brilliant attacking triumvirate of Haller, Serbian striker Luka Jovic and Croatian playmaker Ante Rebic pull out all the stops. Haller's input: 20 goals and 12 assists in all competitions.

Spectacular...a bicycle kick goal versus Crystal Palace was a rare highlight at West Ham United

Hutter revealed that he had not been initially impressed with Haller. "In pre-season, his ball control often was not good," Hutter told *Kicker* magazine in January 2019. "He would lose the ball a lot. But he has the heart of a fighter and soon the ball was sticking and he would be dribbling with great success. It was an unbelievable transformation and physically he was in super condition too. What really struck me was the crazy amount of work he put in. He's a top professional."

Haller has always had his critics, slammed for his poor body language, lack of pace and for not playing with enough killer instinct. But why concentrate on the negatives when the striker in question can combine adroit finishing and soft-shoe creativity. He probably never will achieve unanimity. Being Sebastien Haller is not easy.

Bundesliga heartbreak...Haller misses from the spot against Mainz

STAR IN THE MAKING

How an 18-year-old academy graduate became a vital cog in Manchester United's midfield

Words: Ryan Baldi

Anyone keeping no more than a cursory eye on Manchester United's tumultuous 2023-24 season could be forgiven for misunderstanding the hype surrounding the club's latest academy-bred sensation, Kobbie Mainoo. The midfielder's work is controlled, clean and precise. His demeanour is restrained and mature for an 18-year-old starring for his boyhood club. His calibre is clear if you look for it. But to those not watching carefully, Mainoo's talents might not jump off the screen and command immediate attention in the way that other promising *wunderkinds*, past and present, have.

At least, that was the case until the 97th minute of United's Premier League fixture away at Wolverhampton Wanderers in February. With a fleet-footed skip past two defenders and a beautifully curled finish from the edge of the box to seal a dramatic 4-3 victory for his side, Mainoo grabbed even the most casual viewer by the frontal lobe and etched a vivid portrait of his vast potential onto their cerebral cortex.

"A generational talent," United striker Rasmus Hojlund enthused post-match of his teenage team-mate. "You can see his composure. He is so relaxed on the ball. So much quality on the ball. Now he's also starting to show that he has the scoring parts of his game as well. He's a complete player."

Past United legends agree. Roy Keane said recently that Mainoo can go "right to the very top". Gary Neville concurred, insisting that Mainoo is "a real star." Rio Ferdinand gushed that Mainoo reminds him of Clarence Seedorf in "the way he can manoeuvre in tight situations and the way he manipulates the ball, uses his body at times and shifts it".

Those paying the closest attention to the prospective first-team stars within the club's storied youth system have seen Mainoo's emergence coming for some time.

"When he was 11 or 12, we went to an indoor tournament in Warsaw, Poland, which we won, and he was outstanding," remembers Tony Whelan, United's academy programme advisor who's coached the club's youngsters for more than three decades. "We don't normally win tournaments abroad. We see them as important for the

Solo stunner... Mainoo celebrates his wondergoal against Wolves

development aspect. As he progressed through our academy in the younger age groups, he was always a high performer.

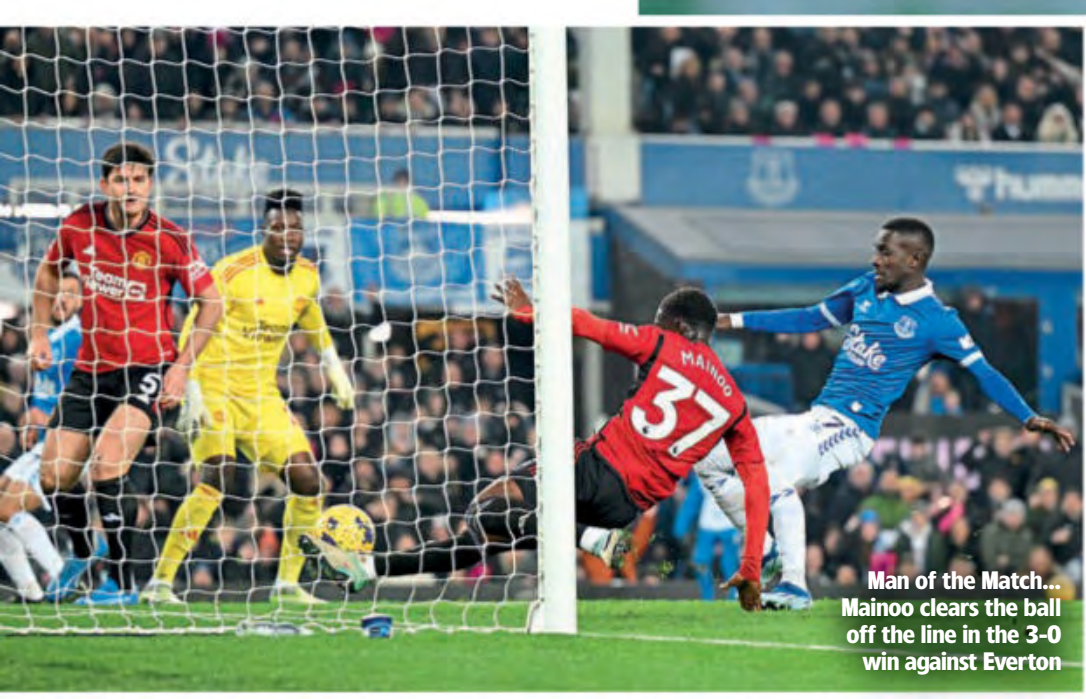
"Whether we won a tournament or not, he'd always be one of the most outstanding players in the group, if not the most outstanding player. Throughout his time here, his performances have always been at a high level."

Hailing from nearby Stockport, Mainoo joined United's academy aged nine and his advanced abilities were such that he regularly played in higher age groups throughout his journey at the Carrington facility. While an Under-16 player, he played more than ten times for United's Under-18s as the club's coaches looked to test his skills and temperament by fielding him amongst bigger and stronger players.

Mainoo was a key figure in United's FA Youth Cup triumph in 2022, scoring twice as the club's youngsters progressed to the showpiece final against Nottingham Forest in front of more than 67,000 spectators at Old Trafford. He was United's second-youngest starter that night, but you wouldn't have known from his performance, as the England Under-19 starlet controlled the midfield alongside fellow top prospect Dan Gore en route to a 3-1 victory. Mainoo had signed his first professional contract a month earlier, on his 17th birthday.

He began to train with Erik ten Hag's first team in October 2022 and made the substitutes' bench for a Premier League match against Newcastle United that month. A senior debut arrived the following January, aged 17, as a starter against Charlton Athletic in the League Cup quarter-finals. The next month brought a Premier League bow, as he came off the bench for the final ten minutes of a 3-0 victory over Leicester City. Mainoo's ascent to the brink of Old Trafford stardom was crowned at the end of the campaign when he was given the

Midfield maestro ...Mainoo exudes calmness, control and maturity in the middle of the park



Man of the Match... Mainoo clears the ball off the line in the 3-0 win against Everton

Old Trafford starlets...Mainoo celebrates a Manchester United goal against West Ham United alongside fellow Red Devils wonderkids Rasmus Hojlund and Alejandro Garnacho

Jimmy Murphy Young Player of the Year award, which recognises the club's best youngster.

With the momentum built in the second half of the previous campaign, Mainoo was catapulted to the forefront of the first-team picture during the Red Devils' 2023 pre-season. He shone in successive starts against Leeds United, Lyon and Arsenal, but an ankle injury picked up in a friendly against Real Madrid in the penultimate game of a tour of the United States kept him out for the early months of the new season.

A first Premier League start eventually arrived at the end of November, after he had recovered from the pre-season injury, and Mainoo proved none of his momentum had been squandered as he was named Man of the Match in a 3-0 victory over Everton at Goodison Park. Ever since, the teenager has remained integral to Ten Hag's side, appearing completely at ease with his newfound superstar status and performing with a degree of composure and confidence beyond his tender years.

His adaptation to life in the spotlight might owe something to the fact he is not the first celebrity in his family – Jordan Hames, his older half-brother, is a former *Love Island* contestant.

But a sounder theory is found in the fact that Mainoo has long had a singular fixation on his career trajectory.

"He was always very resilient," Whelan says. "He had a maturity about him that belied his age. There are not many players at that age where you feel that he knows where he wants to go. He had that. He had a sense of knowing exactly what he wanted to do and where he was going, which is unusual at that age.

"Some players just play and they don't think about the game. You always got a feeling that he seemed to know he was on a mission and that he was always going to be in charge of it. He's driven, just as anyone who gets to our first team is. He knew he was a good player. He had a quiet confidence about him. He could see the way forward for himself when he was getting to 14, 15.

"Young players always have dips. I'd describe the ones he had as mini dips. They weren't major ones. He didn't have any major hiccups or injuries, nothing that was going to derail him."

Thus far in his fledgling senior career, Mainoo has played as one of two deep-lying midfielders in a 4-2-3-1 shape. The culmination of a backward progression, he began life in the Red Devils' academy as a striker, before shining in the higher age groups as a No.10, a No.8 and in his present role, as a No.6.

It is within that deeper remit that his club future is envisaged. It is, after all, where he provides a style and skillset United have lacked desperately for much of their turbulent post-Sir Alex Ferguson years. Ten Hag's pursuit of Barcelona midfielder Frenkie de Jong in the summer of 2022 suggests the United manager has long been aware of his side's lack of a player who can receive the ball in deep areas and play forward – either by passing or dribbling – through pressure. Mainoo's emergence has remedied that shortcoming.

"He always had that composure on the ball," says Whelan. "A lot of that you can't coach. I think he was born with that."

That calmness on the pitch is matched by a level-headedness off it. One club source praised how Mainoo "takes everything in his stride", stating also that they would be surprised if he were to ever allow success to inflate his ego. Which is just as well, because with Old Trafford claimed as his playground, the international stage is next to be conquered. With the 2024 European Championship approaching this summer, the England youth international is making the kind of impression that could see him elevated to the Three Lions' senior set-up in time for the tournament.

If that's to be the case, though, England manager Gareth Southgate might have to move quickly. Ghana, a country Mainoo visits regularly and for whom he qualifies via his parents' background, are preparing to make a move for the starlet's international allegiance. It has been reported that Mainoo would accept the call from England should he be picked, but that he is keeping his options open and is in no rush to commit his future.

If he acclimatises to the international game as readily as he has to club football, Mainoo will be a major asset for whichever nation he elects to represent. If it is to be England, his role could well morph again. "I'm not certain he's necessarily going to be a defensive midfielder, as such," said Southgate after the UEFA Nations League draw. "He's quite a progressive player, but he's had a fabulous start to his career."

Lauded by Hojlund as a "complete player" in the aftermath of his heroics against Wolves, Mainoo has the skills – often subtle; occasionally spectacular – to claim dominion over the Theatre of Dreams for years to come.

There is belief, also, that he could someday follow in the footsteps of Keane, Neville and Ferdinand, the trio of past greats who've sung his praises so loudly: Kobbie Mainoo, future United captain?

"You'd have to say that, yes," Whelan says. "I'm not saying he's going to be a captain now, but he has captained teams coming through the programme.

"He's a credit to our academy. The sort of player you'd want to produce."

Gareth Southgate might have to move quickly. Ghana, a country Mainoo visits regularly and for whom he qualifies via his parents' background, are preparing to make a move

6 of the best

South America's Olympic starlets

Tim Vickery identifies the standout players from the CONMEBOL Olympic qualifying competition, with a tournament review to follow on page 78

1 Thiago ALMADA

ARGENTINA

A 2022 World Cup winner (even if he only made one brief appearance off the bench) who scored Argentina's first post-Qatar goal, much was expected of Thiago Almada in Venezuela. In the event, the attacking midfielder was the tournament's outstanding figure. From the same tough Buenos Aires neighbourhood as Carlos Tevez, Almada showed the strength of character to match his ability, both orchestrating the play and providing the cutting edge.

Superb at turning away from his marker, shrewd in his use of the ball, quick to combine and packing a fierce shot, the Atlanta United playmaker is a high-class operator who coped comfortably with the demands of being the team leader. The doubt is whether he can find a solution when top defenders jockey him onto his left foot.

2 Telasco SEGOVIA

VENEZUELA

Venezuela have hoped for some time that they unearthed an elegant central midfield talent in Segovia – former senior national team coach Jose Pekerman even gave him a brief taste of World Cup qualifying action at the start of 2022.

But Segovia's progress was hindered by a premature move to a problematic Sampdoria, and he has since been shifted on to the small Portuguese club Casa Pia. This tournament, then, was important to him, and he rose to the occasion in style. With solid footballing sense, tight control and an excellent range of passing, Segovia made the Venezuela midfield work, spraying the ball around in fine style. He was often pushed forward, and drove his way into opposing penalty areas. But his future may well be a little deeper, orchestrating play as a kind of Venezuelan Rodri.

3 Diego GOMEZ
PARAGUAY

Attacking midfield powerhouse who linked up with Lionel Messi at Inter Miami in 2023 after a successful first year in Paraguay with Libertad. Already a senior international, he seems set to become a pillar of the team as it rebuilds. Tall, strappingly strong and athletic, he showcased his subtle side in this tournament too, especially with one glorious chipped free-kick against Uruguay and a gorgeous turn and slip pass that set up a goal against Argentina.

Worked well across the attacking line in the space behind the striker, but also capable of operating from deeper. Gomez was the leader of the Paraguayan pack in Venezuela, and could really make a name for himself in Paris this summer.

4 ENDRICK
BRAZIL

The only member of the Brazil squad to have seen action in the current World Cup qualifiers, the Real Madrid-bound 17-year-old was given huge responsibility in Venezuela and did not disappoint. It's certainly not his fault that Brazil failed to qualify for the Olympics.

Endrick scored magnificently taken left-footed goals in both of their first two games. There were no more but, even as he was left isolated up front, he continued to give defenders problems, and kept Brazil in the hunt with a fine pass that set up the winner when they were under the cosh v Venezuela.

So far for Brazil, Endrick has mainly known defeat. But he will be around for many years to come, giving Brazil supporters the right to dream that better times will return.

5 Yaimar MEDINA
ECUADOR

The tournament's breakout star was a teenage winger from Ecuador, so it was a shame that his team failed to make the final stage. A graduate of the prodigious Independiente del Valle talent factory, it would have been good to see Medina in more than the four group games he played – the first two quite sensationally as a second-half substitute, the second two from the start without making the same impact but still showing promise.

A left-footed winger, Medina played on the right for the U20s a year ago, but now featured on his natural side. He can play off either foot, with the first of his three goals slotted in with his right and the second a superb left-footed chip. He slices through on the diagonal in possession, playing quick one-twos as he goes. And if he wins free-kicks, he can take them to devastating effect – one such was the source of his third goal.

6 Luciano RODRIGUEZ
URUGUAY

The star turn of last year's World Cup-winning U20 team took little more than half an hour to race to a hat-trick, and he bowed out at the group stage with five goals to his name – nobody scored more.

"The Uruguayan Mbappe" might be a stretch, but what is striking is his versatility, combining the strength and speed to operate in wide spaces with the subtlety and reactions to stand out in the penalty area. After adding his Venezuela form to last year's achievements (helping a little club to their first national title in addition to his U20 triumph), his time with Uruguayan outfit Liverpool is surely coming to a swift end.

THE MAGIC OF THE POKAL

This season's German Cup has thrown up some remarkable stories. As the semi-finals approach, **Nick Bidwell** examines the remaining contenders

While the Year of the Dragon has recently got underway in China, the 2023-24 German Cup – AKA the DFB-Pokal, Germany's premier knockout competition – has bore all the hallmarks of the Year of the Underdog.

Of the five teams in the draw for the semi-finals (including the participants of the Saarbrucken-Borussia Monchengladbach quarter-final, which was postponed because of heavy rains and at the time of writing had yet to be replayed), non-Bundesliga sides were in the majority with Saarbrucken of the third division plus second-tier outfits Kaiserslautern and Fortuna Dusseldorf still standing.

Top-flight clubs have been dropping like flies from the word go. Four teams (Darmstadt, Bochum, Augsburg and Werder Bremen) were sent packing in the first round; eight (Bayern Munich, Cologne, Hoffenheim, Heidenheim, Mainz, Freiburg, Union Berlin and RB Leipzig) were dumped out in the second; while Borussia Dortmund, Wolfsburg and Eintracht Frankfurt departed the scene in the last 16.

By the quarter-finals, only three Bundesliga sides (Gladbach, Bayer Leverkusen and Stuttgart) were left. Not since the 2003-04 season, when only Bayern, Bremen and Gladbach qualified for the last eight, has such Bundesliga carnage taken place; a highly embarrassing state of affairs for the big boys, of course, but testament also to German football's strength in depth. Indeed, across one February weekend a few weeks ago, the 2. Bundesliga attracted more spectators than the Bundesliga, with 284,643 fans attending second-tier matches compared to 261,099 in the top flight.

Geographically, the last five teams all come from the western side of the country: Kaiserslautern and Saarbrucken from the southwest and the Rhineland trio of Gladbach, Leverkusen and Dusseldorf.

The semis take place on April 2-3, with Kaiserslautern awaiting the winners of Saarbrucken v Gladbach, and Leverkusen hosting Dusseldorf.

FORTUNA DUSSELDORF

Back in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the cosmopolitan Rhineland city of Dusseldorf was very much the place to go for heroics in knockout competitions. Spearheaded by the prolific West Germany international Klaus Allofs, Fortuna were the chosen ones of the DFB-Pokal, finishing runners-up to Cologne in 1977-78 and lifting the trophy in the two following seasons, seeing off Hertha Berlin in 1979 and local rivals Cologne in 1980. At the time, no team in Germany could match them in sudden-death encounters and it was during this all-conquering epoch that they established a German Cup record for consecutive victories (18 in a row between 1978 and 1981).

In the 1978-79 season, they also went on a magnificent run in the European Cup Winners' Cup, beating Romania's Universitatea Craiova, the Alex Ferguson-managed Aberdeen, Swiss outfit Servette and the Czechs Banik Ostrava, before losing the final 4-3 to Barcelona after extra-time. In a thrilling encounter of spectacular end-to-end football, that showpiece in Basel was one of the all-time great European finals. So brave and spirited was the German side's performance that they were feted as conquering heroes on their return home.

Those heady times now seem a million miles away. For the last 37 or so years, Fortuna have been the archetypal yo-yo-club, mainly alternating between the top two divisions, but falling as low as the fourth tier in the early part of the new millennium.

Semi-finalists...Fortuna celebrate winning their quarter-final penalty shootout against fellow second-tier side St Pauli

Fourth in the 2. Bundesliga last term, they were hopeful of mounting a promotion push this campaign, only for chronic inconsistency – especially at home – to throw a spanner in the works. The DFB-Pokal has proved a much happier hunting ground this term, albeit aided by a strong dose of good luck: they have yet to face a Bundesliga side and only overcame St Pauli on penalties in the quarter-finals.

Semi-final opponents Leverkusen will have to pay particular attention to Fortuna's in-form front line of Greek winger Christos Tzolis – on loan from Norwich City – and Dutch centre-forward Vincent Vermeij. Dusseldorf's gifted German-Japanese creative midfielder Shinta Appelkamp will have to be neutralised too.

KAISERSLAUTERN

It has certainly been a season of extreme emotions for the men from the Betzenberg (the nickname for their Fritz-Walter-Stadion). Confident, disciplined and resourceful when unexpectedly claiming the scalps of Cologne, Nuremberg and Hertha Berlin in the cup, yet so abject in the league, losing 13 of their first 23 games of the 2. Bundesliga campaign and in considerable danger of falling through the relegation trapdoor.

Talk about a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside a riddle. Prior to their DFB-Pokal quarter-final at Hertha Berlin in late January, the Red Devils were in absolute free-fall, their morale at rock bottom after suffering eight defeats in ten second-division encounters. So what a shock it was to see Lautern totally dominate Hertha on their own Olympiastadion patch, much better organised defensively than their opponents, winning more balls in the middle of the pitch and a superior threat in attacking transitions, with schemers Tymoteusz Puchacz and Marlon Ritter combining intelligently with twin-strikers Richmond Tachie and Ragnar Ache in a 3-1 victory.

Unified... Kaiserslautern players celebrate with their fans after beating Hertha in the quarter-final

Was it the 74,000 full house in Berlin, including 10,000 visiting fans, that energised the Kaiserslautern ranks? Or was it simply a question of the cup working its dramatic magic? Probably a mixture of both. Not that anyone in the Red Devils camp is remotely interested in such analysis. All that matters is their semi-final berth, their first in the competition since 2014.

The excitement of the Hertha victory, however, did not last long. Following more disappointing results in 2. Bundesliga, head coach Dimitrios Grammozis was fired just a fortnight later, replaced in the hot seat by the veteran Friedhelm Funkel. The latter, a former Kaiserslautern midfielder, certainly knows all about managing German clubs, having spent over three decades in charge of the likes of Uerdingen, Duisburg, Hansa Rostock, Cologne, Eintracht Frankfurt, Bochum and 1860 Munich.

Funkel is Kaiserslautern's third coach of the season, following in the footsteps of Dirk Schuster and Grammozis. That instability tells its own story.

SAARBRUCKEN

Why would the over-achieving Saarlander, currently marooned in mid-table in the third division, fear anyone in the business end of the DFB-Pokal? Their campaign began with a late 2-1 win against second-tier Karlsruhe, then followed that up with two miracles by beating Bayern Munich (2-1) and Eintracht Frankfurt (2-0) at their Ludwigsparkstadion home. Such is the belief in the squad, another giant-killing is not out of the question at all.

Both Bayern and Eintracht only had themselves to blame when succumbing in the western city, palpably lacking in resolve, ideas and energy. But the failings of the supposed big guns should not detract from the exceptional qualities of Saarbrucken: their utter devotion to their gameplan, their compactness, sense of self-sacrifice, fighting spirit, opportunism and their outstanding defensive work, tackling as though their lives depended on it and cleverly shutting down opposition passing lanes.

Prepared to run and battle until they drop, Saarbrucken's death-or-glory manifesto has served them exceedingly well. Coach Rudiger Ziehl sums up their approach to competing as underdogs in a couple of sentences: "From the first whistle, we know we have to go way beyond our limits. Only then do we have a slight chance."

Within this tight-knit band of brothers, several key individuals have emerged into the glare of the national spotlight. Veteran central defender and skipper Manuel Zeitz, 33, who does a fine job of organising the back line; 21-year-old goalkeeper Tim Schreiber, a RB Leipzig loanee, whose smart reactions were instrumental to the unforgettable night of triumph against Bayern, and the dynamic left-sided midfielder Marcel Gaus, who despite his thirty-something status, shows no sign of letting his commitment levels drop.

This is not the first time that Saarbrucken have driven deep into the DFB-Pokal. Just four years ago, they created a sensation by reaching the semi-finals – defeating Cologne, Karlsruhe and Fortuna Dusseldorf along the way – thus becoming the first fourth-tier side to do so.

"Cupset"... Saarbrucken's Marcel Gaus scores against Bayern Munich

BORUSSIA MONCHENGLADBACH

For the Foals, the DFB-Pokal represents the last chance to salvage something from the wreckage of this season. Consistently off-key in the Bundesliga – with only six wins to their name after 23 rounds of the campaign – Gladbach's hopes of a top-six Bundesliga finish were buried a long time ago and now their main concern is avoiding the dreaded drop.

Cup success might only paper over the cracks, but at least it would mean a ticket to the Europa League. Last winners of the German Cup back in 1995, Gerardo Seoane's side have problems galore: sloppy in defensive mode, too slow and unimaginative going forward and toothless in attack, where striker Jordan Pefok, on loan from Union Berlin, has struggled.

Cup team... Gladbach celebrate beating Wolfsburg

BAYER LEVERKUSEN

Arguably the form team in Europe at the moment, Xabi Alonso's outstanding ensemble of collective cohesion and multiple individual game-changers are understandably odds-on to complete a German league-cup double this season. The Rhineland outfit have a much stronger squad than many give them credit for, and even when pressing the rotation button for domestic cup games Alonso's side has not missed a beat, continuing to play with mouth-watering fluidity, poise and control. Watch out for their Moroccan international forward Amine Adli, who is their top scorer in the Pokal this season with four goals and has been impressing recently as the stand-in for injured centre-forward Victor Boniface.

DFB-Pokal top scorer... Leverkusen forward Amine Adli

LEE CASCIARO

"We struggle enough with 11 players, imagine with ten"

Gibraltar's Lee Casciaro discusses his country's crushing defeat to France, their improved form in the Nations League and the upcoming play-out against Lithuania

After a long battle for recognition, Gibraltar finally joined UEFA in 2013, becoming its smallest member in terms of both population and land mass. A British Overseas Territory of just 32,000 people will always face huge obstacles on the international stage, but their tenth year of official competition was perhaps the toughest yet.

Gibraltar lost all ten games they played in 2023, conceding 46 goals and failing to score even once. The nadir was a 14-0 hammering by France in November that made headlines around the world. While this aberrant result had little impact on their Euro 2024 qualifying group, it reignited the eternal debate about how the process is structured and who it serves.

An Ethan Santos own goal after three minutes set the tone for a long and painful night. Gibraltar had barely kicked off before they conceded a second, Marcus Thuram tapping home a rebound from close range. The hapless Santos was then dismissed for a foul on Warren Zaire-Emery as the teenage debutant scored France's third. Everything unravelled from there.

"We knew it was going to be a difficult game," says Lee Casciaro, who played the full 90 minutes at the Allianz Riviera in Nice. "It's an achievement for us, as a small nation, to try to compete at that level. They've got so many stars playing at the top level in France, England and Spain. We were unlucky. We got somebody sent off and that just crushed any potential defensive formation we were going to play. After that, it was going to be even harder to keep the score down."

A loss was almost inevitable from the outset, given the vast disparity in status, resources and football pedigree between the two teams, but not by such a demoralising scoreline. Although the early red card – and the absence of regular starters like Bernardo Lopes, Ethan Britto, Kian Ronan and Graeme Torrilla – left Gibraltar badly exposed, Casciaro still feels they could have done more to hold back the tide.

"It obviously wasn't a nice feeling to be on the pitch because you can't get out your half and you're struggling to get the ball. At the end of the day, we still could have kept a better formation defensively and made it more difficult for them. Looking back at the game, we lacked maturity and the right defensive setup. We should learn from that," says the 42-year-old forward.

"France made more fouls than us even though we conceded 14 goals. The boys need to toughen up and put themselves about. Be a bit more aggressive and get in their faces, which we did against the Netherlands three days down the line."

Casciaro was unfortunate to give away a penalty for handball, which Kylian Mbappe converted to put France 4-0 up after half an hour. By that stage, the game was simply an exercise in damage limitation, but the minnows found it impossible to stem the bleeding. Seven goals were conceded in each half as a relentless France made history – their biggest win was also Gibraltar's heaviest defeat by a considerable margin.

It's worth emphasising the extent to which these two countries are drawing on very different talent pools. At 67 million, France's population is more than 2,000 times larger than Gibraltar's, without even considering the state-of-the-art facilities and sporting infrastructure at their disposal.

While Didier Deschamps' team contains players from Milan, Bayern Munich, Juventus and Atletico Madrid, the Gibraltar squad almost exclusively represent clubs in their local league. The majority, like Casciaro, are at Lincoln Red Imps, whose European exploits have enabled them to tighten their stranglehold on domestic competitions in recent years.

Gibraltar tried desperately to keep France at bay, but Ousmane Dembele made it double figures shortly after coming off the bench. The irrepressible Mbappe scored twice more to complete his hat-trick before Olivier Giroud grabbed a late brace. At full-time, the mood in the away dressing room was one of wounded pride and sombre introspection.

"It was disappointing. It doesn't matter who you're playing against, you still go on the pitch thinking you can get something. That's how I approach each game," says Casciaro. "The chances are that you're going to lose every single game against France, but you still think you can take something positive out of it. Obviously, it's not nice conceding so many goals. After the game, we didn't talk much, maybe because you still feel like you could've done something more."

Gibraltar had met France five months earlier in Faro, Portugal, their temporary home while Victoria Stadium is being completely rebuilt at a reported cost of £100 million. On that occasion, they managed to stifle Europe's top-ranked side to good effect, losing just 3-0. This was a much more punishing experience. ➤

Gibraltar stalwart... forward Lee Casciaro in action against the Netherlands last year

Humiliation...the scoreboard inside Nice's Allianz Riviera

"We had a few major injuries, especially in midfield, that did a lot of damage to us. Having the crowd pushing them on made it difficult for us to get out. We struggle enough with 11 players, imagine with ten. It's a learning curve for new players about what playing at that level entails, and what's expected," says Casciaro, who has won over 60 caps for his country.

Over the last decade, Gibraltar have made considerable strides and shown they can compete with established teams in the right circumstances. One-sided games, and sometimes heavy losses, are a fact of life for newcomers like them, but they remain undeterred, admirably persisting in the face of overwhelming odds.

While some of the Gibraltar squad are fully professional, others work normal jobs alongside playing football. Casciaro, a policeman, has done so throughout his career. He considers it a privilege to represent his country against elite opposition. Proponents of reform suggest that minnows should go through pre-qualifying and "earn the right" to compete with the best sides. Like many, he has mixed feelings about the idea.

"If it's to improve the football, I don't see why not. Obviously, you want to go out and enjoy having possession, so that would benefit us as a small nation. But then [the bigger nations] would probably complain that they don't like to play against top nations all the time because they might feel that they have to push themselves even further than playing against us, for example."

Because of the unavoidable barriers and limitations that Gibraltar face, the significance of any success they enjoy is amplified. They beat Malta in June 2014 to claim their first official win and there have been just seven more since then. Four have come in the UEFA Nations League, which has proven a welcome addition to the international calendar.

The competition has benefitted smaller nations by enabling them to play more games against teams of a similar standard. Rather than setting up merely to defend and to withstand pressure for as long as possible, having more of the ball gives them scope to develop in an attacking sense. They are encouraged to take the initiative and find a way to win, theoretically becoming more rounded teams.

> "The chances are that you're going to lose every single game against France, but you still think you can take something positive out of it"

Gibraltar were proud to win promotion from Nations League D, the bottom tier, in 2020. They finished top of their group with eight points from four games, after going unbeaten against Liechtenstein and San Marino. That run delivered tangible achievement and a real confidence boost.

The jump in quality to League C is considerable. Georgia, Bulgaria and North Macedonia provided a much sterner test and Gibraltar managed just a single draw last time around. Hopefully stronger for the experience, a two-legged play-out against Lithuania at the end of March will decide their fate. The winners will remain in the third tier (paired with Romania, Kosovo and Cyprus) with the losers relegated back to League D (again alongside Liechtenstein and San Marino).

A shift in mentality will be needed, particularly after last year's run of dispiriting results. Although Lithuania have also struggled recently, Casciaro and his team-mates still go into the tie as huge underdogs. The Baltic side are 138th in the FIFA rankings, 63 places above Gibraltar. They will have to find a way to bridge that gap.

"It's a good game to look forward to. We still believe that it's a game where we can compete," says Casciaro. "It would be a major achievement to stay in Nations League C. As a national team, it's important to be competing at that level, even though it's difficult for us. The players will be really motivated."

The two countries have never met before so this will be another milestone in Gibraltar's development. Playing meaningful matches like this – the home leg will be their 85th since joining UEFA – is why they embarked on the journey to begin with. That crushing defeat

Another goal conceded ...Gibraltar's defence watch the ball hit the back of the net again

Seeing red...Gibraltar's Ethan Santos crunches into a tackle on *Les Bleus'* debutant goalscorer Warren Zaire-Emery

to France was a harsh reminder of the company they now keep, how far they've come and how much further there still is to go.

"Everything is more professional. The players are physically in much better shape. We have a better setup and we train every day. We still have a lot to learn but the league is improving year by year. It's much more competitive," explains Casciaro.

"Once the stadium is built that will be another step forward. The ball will move a lot faster across the pitch, making it easier for us to compete at a higher level. But I think, for such a small nation, and the ten years we've been in UEFA, we've probably overachieved."

Casciaro has been there virtually throughout, even claiming the honour of scoring Gibraltar's first goal in a competitive match against Scotland. He plans to carry on for as long as he feels able to contribute, while also supporting the younger generation to take the team forward once he and his fellow pioneers have stepped aside.

Words and interview by Sean Cole

PONTUS JANSSON

"I left something fantastic, but I was also going home to something fantastic"

The Swedish defender talks cult hero status at Leeds United, promotion with Brentford and his Malmo homecoming

What motivated you to return to Malmo last summer?
A lot of things. Mainly to come home to where everything started. I always wanted to come back in good shape and at a good age, but also to leave England on a high. That was the most important thing. When I left Malmo ten years ago, I said quite early on that when I come home, I want to be able to perform at a good level. I learned my passion for football through this club. When I was young, I was in the stands with my brothers, my father and my mum. The club's taking huge steps to compete with teams in Europe, but the heart of the people still working here is the same.

You'd achieved so much with Brentford. Was it tough to leave that behind?
Yeah, it was a big decision to take. It came a little bit from nowhere when I told them. Brentford knew that one day I wanted to go home to Malmo, but they were not really prepared for it. I had four fantastic years there and we'd just finished ninth in the Premier League, so it was good timing. I could leave them in good hands. I left something fantastic, but I was also going home to something fantastic.

Last season ended in dramatic circumstances, with Malmo beating Elfsborg 1-0 to pip them to the title on goal difference. What emotions did you go through during that game?
It was fantastic to play in what was like a final on the last day – at home in front of a full house, against the team you're competing with – knowing that if you win the game, you're going to win the title. That doesn't happen often, so it was special. To win and to lift the trophy, it was one of the best days in my football career. It was a big decision to come home to Malmo, and there were big expectations because I was coming from the Premier League, so it was a big relief to finally be champions. Looking at the bigger picture, it gave me the tools to work in a better way in the coming years, instead of being stressed on the final day.

After starting out as a striker, how did you become a centre-back?
I almost forget that I played as a striker! It was one of my coaches here in my previous time at Malmo [Roland Nilsson]. When you're young, sometimes you have to fill in different positions. I played centre-back in one internal game. I did well and they asked me if I could keep doing it. I started to play some B team games as a centre-back, then we had some injuries in the first team so suddenly I was thrown in there and did well. After that, no one asked me if I wanted to go back to being a striker and I'm still here today, so I think that was the best decision.

You joined Torino in 2014 but only made 25 appearances in two years there. How do you reflect on that period?
When I left Malmo, I was still living with my parents. It was the same for my girlfriend. We left our childhood rooms behind and went out into the big world. We didn't understand the language, so we had to learn that. Then you start to learn how to live independently. Getting into a new team, a new culture, a new type of football. Maybe I didn't play every game, but I learned so much as a footballer, and mostly as a person. I grew up, so it was a very good experience for me. Italy was the platform for my successful years in England. I went from a boy to a man.

How did you end up joining Leeds United?
When I went to Italy, I was playing behind the captain [Kamil Glik]. They sold him, and the plan was for me to sign a new contract and stay at Torino, but then the coach [Gian Piero Ventura] took over the Italian national team. Often, a new coach wants to have his own players. If I didn't have a secure place in the team, I'd have to look into other options. Leeds came out of nowhere. I knew one of Garry Monk's assistant coaches, Pep Clotet, because I'd worked with him at Malmo. I got in contact with them and it went very quick. One day later, I was in Leeds signing the contract. It was a loan with an option to buy. ➤

Back home...Jansson celebrates scoring a goal for Malmo
Credit: Alamy

You soon became a cult hero at Leeds. Why do you think you had such a strong relationship with the supporters?
I've always been a very passionate player. Leeds were in a dark place when I arrived and, all of a sudden, we started to win games. I was myself. I celebrated tackles and wins. I think they saw themselves in me on the pitch. I had a big love for Leeds. They saw the real passion that I had. There was nothing fake about it. I really loved it. The whole hype around Leeds went from the bottom to the top so quick and I was part of that.

Marcelo Bielsa took over as Leeds manager for your third season. What did you make of him?
He was good for my personal development. I got more serious about food and sleep. He was very strict about that. The only thing with Marcelo was that he maybe held my passion back a little bit. I became more closed on the pitch, but maybe that was also good because I felt like I had one of the best seasons in my career with him. I learned so many things from him that I'm still using today, both on and off the pitch. It was very positive. He was one of the best coaches I had. He got fantastic results with Leeds. They'd never have done that without the high demands he has.

You were always a key player for Leeds. Why did your time there come to an abrupt end in 2019?
Sometimes things happen so quickly and they're not in your hands. Because of the financial fair play rules, they wanted to sell some players and I was one of them. I wanted to stay. That was the only thing in my mind when they first told me. When they said they had to take that decision, it was up to me to decide where I wanted to go. I said: "If you want to sell me, it has to be to a club in England." It took a bit of time but then Brentford arrived. It's probably the best decision of my life.

Homecoming hero... Jansson celebrates winning the 2023 Swedish league title
Credit: Alamy

What was the appeal of joining Brentford?
I knew who Brentford were and the good football they played. They had a squad full of young players with big talent, but they didn't have the experience I had. The mentality of

Formative years...the young centre-back in action during his first spell at Malmo back in 2011

Fans' favourite...Jansson was hugely popular at Elland Road

"Life-changer"...winning promotion to the Premier League with Brentford in 2021 was a career highlight for Jansson

winning and closing out games. They could score four or five goals in a game and concede that many too. That was something they needed to change. I had a good meeting with Thomas Frank and Rasmus Ankersen, the sporting director at the time. It was lots of things, but mostly hearing the club's intentions.

You finally reached the Premier League in 2021 after suffering play-off disappointment previously with both Leeds and Brentford. What did it mean to win promotion?
It was a life-changer. Playing in the Premier League was one of the biggest dreams I had. I saw Leeds go up while I was still in the Championship, fighting with Brentford, and that was something I wanted to experience. That was probably the biggest and best day in my life. It changed how I see my career and my time in England. We played well against some of the best teams in the world. I'm very proud of the journey we had at Brentford.

Ivan Toney has been a massive part of Brentford's success. How impressive was he to play with?
I also played with Ollie Watkins, who I really rate. As footballers, they are both equally good but, as a character and a leader, Ivan is one level above. At club level, he's the best striker I played with. In games, he was so cool, so calm, so composed. The main reason he was so good is the goals he scored for us, but he gave me that calmness to lead the group as captain. I was very fortunate to have David Raya behind me, Christian Norgaard in front of me and Ivan at the top. That was the spine of the team. We had a captain's group, which was the four of us, together with Thomas, and we often had talks.

> "I had a big love for Leeds. They saw the real passion that I had. There was nothing fake about it. I really loved it"

The Brentford squad had a really strong bond, which continues to this day. What was it like to captain that group?
Most of the players who went up and performed in the Premier League were also together in the Championship. It makes it even more special to do that big journey together. It's normal that you can perform better if you sign ten new players, but we had almost the same squad, and still finished 13th and ninth in the two years I was there. Being captain was a big honour and I loved it. I still miss leading out the boys on game day. They're fantastic players who are now also friends for life because of the things we achieved together.

Thomas Frank has overseen Brentford's progress. How would you describe him?
A fantastic coach. Very open-minded and a very good guy to work with on a day-to-day basis. He talks to everyone and has a relationship with everyone. Of course, not everyone loves him, but everyone respects him. I think that's very important. As a coach, he wants to adapt and try new things. He wants to get better and push his team to the next level all the time. He never wants to get comfortable.

Your Malmo contract runs until December 2027, when you'll be 36. Does football still excite you in the same way it did when you were starting out?
When you get older, I think you see football a little bit differently than you did when you were young, but the passion is still there. I still have the joy to go out and train even though it's cold and the pitch is artificial. In the summer, we're going to compete in Europe and later on we're going to compete for the title. You always have those things in your mind and that gives you motivation. I want to help the younger players to perform here but also to maybe go and compete on the stages that I did. I have a responsibility to help them, push them, teach them. Get them ready for what's coming. You have to be lucky with injuries, but I'm in good shape so hopefully I can play for as long as possible.

Interview by Sean Cole

Glenn Moore

New clubs, new signings and a new league

The 2024 American women's soccer season promises plenty of intrigue – both in the NWSL and its new rival, the USL Super League

Title holders... NJ/NY Gotham celebrate winning last season's NWSL championship

The 12th season of America's National Women's Soccer League kicks off on March 16 bolstered by further expansion, a record-breaking TV deal and increasing evidence that it can withstand the challenge from Europe.

Yet despite the excitement of new clubs, players, coaches and owners, there is also, thanks to the unique structure of US professional sports, a new league on the horizon. The USL Super League, which has been granted the same top-tier status as the NWSL, launches later this year. How it will affect the US women's soccer landscape is anyone's guess.

NWSL has geared up to meet the twin threat from across the Atlantic and within its own shores by using the staggering new $240 million four-year TV deal (a huge increase on the previous $4.5m three-year one) to double the salary cap. Coupled with an increase in free agents, this has led to significant off-season transfer activity headlined by expansion club Bay FC shattering the world transfer record to sign 23-year-old Zambia striker Racheal Kundananji from Madrid CFF for €735,000 plus a potential €75,000 in add-ons. Alongside the acquisitions of Nigeria's Asisat Oshoala from Barcelona and Venezuala forward Deyna Castellanos (Manchester City), the league's newest club instantly has the most eye-catching attack in the league, with Mexico's Scarlett Camberos (Angel City) and Ghana's Princess Marfo (Nordsjaelland) in support. It is not just about attack. Bay FC have also recruited Scottish veteran Jen Beattie from Arsenal and two-time NWSL winner Emily Menges from Portland Thorns to strengthen the defence.

All of which suggest Bay FC – who will play in San Jose, California for at least their first five seasons – intend to make as much of a splash as 2023 newcomers San Diego Wave who won the regular season Shield. Cuban-born coach Albertin Montoya, a veteran of the US scene and well respected locally but with limited experience at senior level, is the inaugural coach.

The other new club are a returning old one, Utah Royals, whose franchise closed in 2020 after an ownership scandal with the squad transferred to the reborn Kansas City. Former player Amy Rodriguez, a World Cup winner in 2015, will coach the team in her first senior role.

After another high-turnover winter there are six other new coaches, including Jonatan Giraldez joining Washington Spirit from Barcelona, fellow Spaniard Fran Alonso (ex-Celtic) at Houston Dash, former US head coach Vlatko Andonovski back at Kansas City, and ex-Jamaica boss Lorne Donaldson at Chicago Red Stars.

> Bay FC shattered the world transfer record to sign 23-year-old Zambia striker Racheal Kundananji from Madrid CFF

Utah have been more conservative in filling up their roster, with Nigeria forward Ifeoma Onumonu, recruited from NJ/NY Gotham FC, the most notable signing at time of going to press.

Marquee signing ...Zambia forward Racheal Kundananji has joined NWSL debutants Bay FC

After Bay FC, the most ambitious club has been Gotham. As defending champions it might be imagined they do not need to improve the squad much, but the New Jersey-based team actually finished sixth, scraping into the play-offs for an underdog triumph.

Cannily using the new free agency rules, they have hired four current US internationals: Crystal Dunn (Portland Thorns), Rose Lavelle, Emily Sonnett (both Seattle Reign) and Tierna Davidson (Chicago). This gave them seven of the US Gold Cup squad, meaning they now have the roster of champions as well as the status.

Fortunately for Gotham, unlike for some previous major tournaments, NWSL will break for five weeks for the Paris Olympics. That is also a relief for Wave and Thorns, both of whom are likely to have half-a-dozen players in France, though not all with the US. Wave, being regular season winners, did not need to add much with Sweden defender Hanna Lundkvist, from Atletico Madrid, the main recruit.

Thorns, having lost Dunn, Menges and Rocky Rodriguez (Angel City) have been busier, signing Canadian Jessie Fleming for $320,000 from Chelsea and Denmark's Isabella Obaze from Rosengard.

Kansas City Current, who will unveil their new 11,500-capacity stadium when they host Thorns in the season's opener, have signed Malawi captain Temwa Chawinga from Wuhan Jianghan and Canada's Nichelle Prince from Houston.

Other notable transfers include Reign picking up South Korea's Ji So-yun, who lit up the WSL with Chelsea for years, from Suwon FC; another veteran, Japan striker Yuki Nagasato, joining Chicago; and US international Taylor Flint (née Kornieck) being traded from Wave to Racing Louisville.

Equally significant, with the advent

of free agency for some, have been contract extensions. Chicago gave Mallory Swanson a four-year $2m deal exceeding in total, if not annually, the record established when Houston renewed Mexican winger Maria Sanchez on a three-year $1.5m contract.

Big as these sums are, in a league that began with a $6,000 floor and now has a $37,856 minimum salary, they are short of the reported $550,000 annual package Thembi Kgatlana will get having swapped Louisville for Mexico's Tigres UANL. Nor could the NWSL keep established US cap Emily Fox, who left North Carolina Courage for Arsenal in the WSL.

And what of the new Super League, owned by United Soccer League (USL), a second-tier men's league. It will launch in eight cities, most in the East but also Dallas-Fort Worth and Spokane, Washington. That means an overlap in the New York area, Washington and, arguably, North Carolina and Florida. Five more teams will join by 2026 with four others in the wings.

A nation the size of the US ought to be able to support 32 professional women's clubs, but it has taken the NWSL a dozen years to get up to 14 (with Boston joining NWSL in 2026). In any other country, they would be in two divisions, with promotion and relegation; in the US, they will be rivals, fighting for players, sponsors and broadcasters.

USL will be more in line with the rest of the world: a fall-spring season, an academy system instead of a college draft, and players signing to clubs rather than centrally, meaning they won't suddenly find they're being traded 1,000 miles away without their consent.

If the league gets established, this will attract players, and the NWSL may have to adapt, fight or merge. There is a precedent: America's biggest sports event, the Super Bowl, was a result of a merger between the NFL and an upstart league. It could, though, be messy.

Round-up

Winners... Spain added the UEFA Nations League to their World Cup crown

SPAIN WIN UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE

Spain won the inaugural Nations League and sealed a place at the Paris Olympics with successive wins in Seville over the Netherlands (3-0) and France (2-0), Aitana Bonmati scoring in both games.

With France, who had defeated Germany in the semi-finals 2-1, hosting the Olympics, the third-place play-off became a Games eliminator. It was won by Germany, beating the Dutch 2-0 thanks to goals by Klara Buhl and Lea Schuller, to complete a remarkable recovery from their World Cup debacle. It will be Spain's first Olympics, while Germany won gold in Rio in 2016.

TRIO BOOK OLYMPICS PASSAGE

Elsewhere, Australia and Japan took Asia's Olympics spots. The Matildas made light of the absence of Sam Kerr, crushing Uzbekistan 10-0 in Melbourne after a 3-0 first-leg win in Tashkent. In a much tighter tie the *Nadeshiko* edged North Korea 2-1, all the goals coming in Tokyo after a goalless draw in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where the first leg was moved from Pyongyang.

In Apia, Samoa, New Zealand beat the Solomon Islands 11-1 in the Oceania qualifying final to book their Paris place. "The gap between amateur and professional is too big. It was our goal to reach the final, we are still happy," said Solomon Islands head coach Batram Suri.

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE DRAW

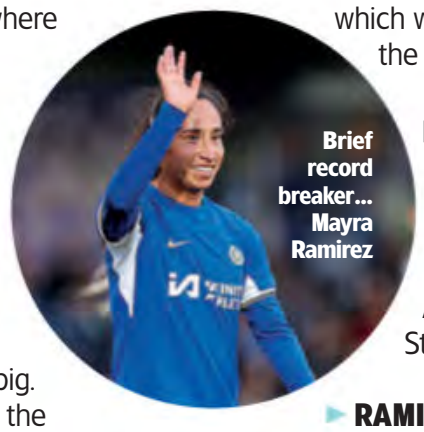
Barcelona and Lyon, winners of the last eight Champions League titles between them, are on course for a third final meeting in six years after the quarter-final draw kept the giants apart.

UEFA Champions League favourites...Barcelona

Holders Barcelona will face Brann, the first Norwegian team to reach this stage since 2019. The Bergen-based club came through three qualifying rounds just to reach the group stage. The winners will meet the team that emerges from Chelsea's tie with Ajax, the first Dutch club to make the last eight since Saestum back in 2007.

In the other half of the draw, Lyon will be fancied to beat a Benfica team making their last-eight debut – the first Portuguese team to get this far. They would then meet either Swedish club BK Hacken or Paris Saint-Germain, which would be a repeat of the 2017 all-French final.

The quarter-finals take place on March 19-20 and 27-28, the semis on April 20-21 and 27-28, with the final to be held in Spain at Athletic's San Mames Stadium on May 25.



Brief record breaker... Mayra Ramirez

RAMIREZ JOINS WSL

Mayra Ramirez was briefly the world's most expensive player when Chelsea paid Levante €450,000 to sign the Colombian forward, only to be soon eclipsed by Racheal Kundananji. The value of the move to Chelsea was underlined when US striker Mia Fishel followed Australia's Sam Kerr in suffering an ACL injury.

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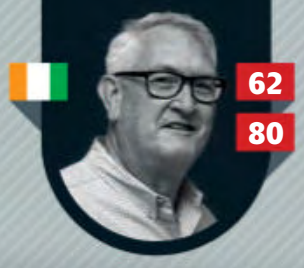

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2023 Asian Cup...full tournament review and squads

Africa's 'miracle' men

Ivory Coast's rollercoaster ride to the AFCON trophy on home soil defied logic

Depending on your point of view, Ivory Coast could be perceived among the most fortuitous winners of a major continental title, or as a side of admirable resilience and mental fortitude, who suffered a sudden plummet to the depths but then pulled themselves back from the brink in the most extraordinary circumstances.

But whatever label, if ever a host nation has had a circuitous path to glory, then it is the Elephants, who became the first home team to take the Africa Cup of Nations since Egypt in 2006.

They snuck through the group stages of their own tournament, emerging as the last of the four best third-placed finishers with a paltry three points from their group games, before embarking on a run of narrow escapes that saw them end Senegal's reign, come back to win against Mali despite being down to ten men and then take the title with a fairy-tale finish, as Sebastien Haller touched home the winner, some 18 months after his cancer diagnosis.

Young coach... Ivory Coast's new boss Emerse Fae

Their good fortune came from the fact that Morocco's win over Zambia in the last of their group games ensured they advanced as one of the lucky losers. A late penalty against Senegal in their round of 16 tie was also a fortunate break, but after that determined grit and drive dominated their play, and redemption in the final was deserved. It produced the emotive rollercoaster that makes sport so compelling.

Playing at home, the Ivorians were always going to be fancied, even though they have not been among Africa's heavyweights since last winning the Cup of Nations in 2015.

But they laboured under the weight of expectation in their opening game, and were then outmuscled by Nigeria before a humiliating defeat against tiny Equatorial Guinea in a contest where everything that could go wrong for them did – and vice versa for the opponent. It was reminiscent of Brazil's bemusing 7-1 collapse against Germany in the

African champions... Max Gradel lifts the 2023 AFCON trophy

> "When I think about all we went through, the hard times when we were almost out, and the matches where we came back in the last minutes, we have created some miracles"
>
> Ivory Coast head coach Emerse Fae

2014 World Cup semi-final.

In the three days while the Ivorians waited to see whether they were still in their own tournament, which cost the state an estimated US$1 billion to put on, their veteran French coach Jean-Louis Gasset was sent packing. The orders came from government although Gasset insisted he had quit rather than been sent on his way. Herve Renard, coach of the Ivorians in their previous Cup of Nations triumph, was sought as an emergency replacement but his employers, the French Football Federation, rejected the idea.

So, it was left to Gasset's assistant Emerse Fae to take over, appointed on his 40th birthday. He was in the Ivorian midfield when they lost in the 2006 AFCON final in Cairo but his coaching experience was limited to the youth teams at Nice and Clermont.

He drafted in former team-mate Guy Demel, the former West Ham United right-back working as an analyst for *Canal+'s* French language coverage of the tournament and the pair made some bold changes for their first game. Gasset's first names on the teamsheet were always the midfield axis of Seko Fofana, Franck Kessie and Ibrahim Sangare, but Fae drafted in Hull City's Jean Michael Seri to cover the back four with Kessie dropped against Senegal.

But they were behind after four minutes and were on their way out until Senegal goalkeeper Edouard Mendy gave away a late penalty that Kessie, by then on as a substitute, tucked away. The Ivorians grimly held on to then triumph in the post-match penalty shootout.

The quarter-final against Mali saw Kessie restored and Sangare dropped, but centre-back Odilon Koussounou – also brought into the fold after not appearing in the group stage – gave away a penalty, which Yahia Fofana saved, and then got himself sent off for a second caution before half-time.

Down to ten men, the Ivorians then conceded in the 71st minute and looked to be heading out against their northern neighbours. But their determination was gripping as they kept surging forward, despite the numerical disadvantage, in search of salvation. It came first from Simon Adingra in the 90th minute, dribbling into the box before laying the ball for Seko Fofana, whose shot was blocked but rebounded for Adingra to snatch up and score.

Like Adingra, Haller came off the bench after recovering from injury, having missed the early stages of the tournament, and headed against the crossbar in extra-time. But the win was not secured until right at the end when Mali cleared a set-piece to Seko Fofana, who fired at goal and it was deliberately deflected by Oumar Diakite for a dramatic victory.

The recovery was in full swing going into the semi-final against the Democratic Republic of Congo, although Haller's winner had a touch of fortune about it, partially miscued but struck firmly into the ground so that the bounce carried it over the keeper and into the net.

In the final, the Ivorians dominated early but allowed Nigeria back into the contest after the cooling break. Every game in the tournament had two stops for hydration, no matter how late at night, due to the heat and humidity. The breaks were called in the 30th and 70th minutes and often had the effect of changing the tempo of the game, or seeing one side suddenly lose momentum and the balance of the game switch.

Nigeria led at the break but the tide turned with Kessie's equaliser and then Haller got the winner to complete a most riveting month of twists, turns and dramatic travails.

"When I think about all we went through, the hard times when we were almost out, and the matches where we came back in the last minutes, we have created some miracles. But it is also because we kept fighting to the last minute when the odds were against us," said Fae, now a Cup of Nations winner after only four matches as a senior coach in a barely believable feat.

"We feel relief firstly after all the difficulties. We were close to humiliation but when we had a second chance, we were determined not to waste it," he added.

Dramatic...Oumar Diakite celebrates with his Ivory Coast team-mates after scoring the winner against Mali

Shock early exits in knockout stage

Heavyweight clash...Nigeria knocked out Cameroon in the last 16

LAST 16

Nigeria's clash with Cameroon in Abidjan provided an immediate heavyweight tie on the first day of the knockout stages, and it did not disappoint as the Super Eagles provided a first convincing showing of the tournament to send home their long-standing rivals. Victor Osimhen's work-rate was astonishing, but it was Ademola Lookman who scored both goals in a performance that exposed the Indomitable Lions' poverty of ideas, with Rigobert Song's coaching acumen consistently questioned.

Guinea had never won a match in the knockout phase of the tournament, but finally secured a victory by ending Equatorial Guinea's giant-killing run. But it took a goal with virtually the last touch of the match, eight minutes into stoppage-time, from Mohamed Bayo to send the gallant *Nzalang Nacional* home after top scorer Emilio Nsue had missed a penalty.

DR Congo and Egypt each drew their three group games, so it was no surprise that their clash in San-Pedro ended all square at 1-1 after extra-time. It took 18 penalties for the tie to be settled, with Egypt goalkeeper Mohamed Abou Gabal "Gabaski" missing his effort to leave his Congolese counterpart Lionel Mpasi to win the tie.

Having limped into the last 16, there was little hope among the locals about Ivory Coast's chances in Yamoussoukro against holders Senegal, and that seemed to be vindicated after just four minutes as Habib Diallo handed the 2021 champions an early lead. Sadio Mane could have seen red before Senegal were denied a penalty, but as full-time approached the Ivorians won a spot-kick themselves, which Franck Kessie converted. They then held their nerve to send Senegal packing after a penalty shootout.

There was an even bigger shock when Morocco went out to South Africa, with the first goal coming from forward Evidence Makgopa who was onside by the slimmest of margins for his 57th-minute goal. Achraf Hakimi then missed a penalty, Sofyan Amrabat got sent off and Teboho Mokoena hammered home the final nail with a superb free-kick in a surprise 2-0 victory.

Elsewhere, Angola thrashed Namibia 3-0 – courtesy of prolific duo Gelson Dala and Mabululu – Cape Verde saw off Mauritania thanks to a late Ryan Mendes penalty, and Mali edged out Burkina Faso 2-1 – Lassine Sinayoko's third goal of the tournament proving decisive.

QUARTER-FINALS

With Cameroon, Senegal, Egypt, Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea and Morocco's eliminations, the quarter-finals comprised an entirely different line-up from the final eight in Cameroon two years ago.

Cape Verde's march to the last eight turned the smallest of all the countries in the 24-team field into genuine title contenders, and they had every chance of defeating a tired South Africa in Yamoussoukro. But the ball would just not go in for the islanders, with substitute Gilson Benchimol coming closest but denied by a terrific reflex save from Ronwen Williams. The South African goalkeeper then pulled off four astonishing saves to set a new record for an international penalty shootout and see his side into the semi-finals for the first time in almost a quarter-century. *Bafana Bafana* certainly rode their luck, as had been the case in the previous round against Morocco.

Nigeria, perennial semi-finalists, were the first team to book a place in the last four (for a record-extending 15th time) with a 1-0 win over Angola as Lookman scored yet again, set up this time by the pace of Moses Simon on the flank. It could have been a bigger scoreline as Nigeria were the better side, although Angola substitute Zini hit the woodwork in the second half.

Penalty shootout heroics...South Africa goalkeeper Ronwen Williams

DR Congo finally won a game, and convincingly so too, coming from behind to beat Guinea 3-1 in Abidjan. Skipper Chancel Mbemba gave away a penalty but then redeemed himself with a quick equaliser before Yoane Wissa and a free-kick from Arthur Masuaku saw the Leopards through.

The Ivorians produced another barely believable escape act as goalkeeper Yahia Fofana saved an early Mali penalty from Hull City's Adama "Noss" Traore before Odilon Koussounou was sent off for a second bookable offence minutes before half-time. Down to ten men,

Semi-final match-winner...Ivory Coast star Sebastien Haller

the writing was on the wall for the hosts when Mali's Nene Dorgeles curled home a long-range shot with 20 minutes to go but they conjured up an astonishing comeback. First Brighton's Simon Adingra equalised on the stroke of full-time and then Oumar Diakite's subtle touch to Seko Fofana's shot made it 2-1 in added time of extra-time. It was another result that left observers shaking their heads at the pure drama and fairy-tale conclusion.

SEMI-FINALS

South Africa would have snatched a come-from-behind win had Khuliso Mudau not fluffed a glaring chance in the last minute of extra-time against Nigeria, but it was the Super Eagles who then went on to triumph on post-match penalties after a 1-1 draw. There were none of the heroics from the last-eight shootout from South Africa goalkeeper Williams, as Kelechi Iheanacho, who missed most of the tournament through injury, tucked away the decisive kick after Nigeria keeper Stanley Nwabali saved two of the South African efforts.

The two goals in the game were also from the penalty spot. Nigeria took the lead after Osimhen was upended and William Troost-Ekong tucked away the penalty midway through the second half. Osimhen thought he had sealed the win with a second in the last minute, only for VAR to highlight a foul at the other end on Percy Tau in the Nigeria box. Osimhen's goal was chalked off, a spot-kick was awarded at the other end, and Teboho Mokoena drew South Africa level. It was a deserved lifeline for South Africa, who had looked the more enterprising of the two teams, but ultimately not enough.

VAR decisions in the tournament were consistently good and there was deserved praise for the refereeing too. That match in Bouake was followed by the Ivorians against DR Congo in Abidjan and it was the one game of the finals where the hosts looked comfortably in charge. Haller was making his first start after recovering from an ankle injury, and he missed with a close-range header from Wilfried Singo's pinpoint cross in the 40th minute before scoring just after the hour-mark. Kessie struck the woodwork with a powerful left-footed shot in the 42nd minute that hit the bottom of the upright, bouncing away from goal with the Congolese keeper beaten. The DRC, who were attempting to reach their first final since 1974 (when they were known as Zaire), had a good opportunity at the end of a mazy dribbling run from substitute Theo Bongonda early in the second half but he hit the side-netting with his effort.

> With Cameroon, Senegal, Egypt, Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea and Morocco's eliminations, the quarter-finals comprised an entirely different line-up from the final eight in Cameroon two years ago

FINAL

For only the fourth time this century – comprising 13 AFCON finals – there were three goals in normal time of the final, with Haller touching in the winner nine minutes from the end as he stretched his leg high ahead of the defence to provide an expert's touch and hand the Ivorians a third Cup of Nations title.

Troost-Ekong's header gave Nigeria the lead at the Alassane Ouattara Olympic Stadium in Abidjan as he rose to meet Samuel Chukwueze's flick-on from a corner, coming after they had weathered a positive attacking start from the hosts. The Nigeria captain rose powerfully above his Ivorian counterpart Serge Aurier for a third goal of the tournament.

"At half-time in the changing room we just talked with the players to keep on fighting and putting pressure on Nigeria," explained coach Fae. "We had started the game well and had good control, setting up opportunities but we lost focus and Nigeria scored against the run of play."

After the break, Nigeria tired visibly, were unable to keep possession and it was the Ivorians who fought back and proved the better team. Kessie equalised just past the hour-mark after being left unmarked at the back post from another corner after Nwabali had to beat away a superb long-range shot from the livewire Adingra.

Haller then steered Adingra's cross into the net for the winner and was in tears at the end of the game when the enormity of his achievement after fighting off testicular cancer sunk in.

Adingra, who was a constant danger on the left flank, was denied by a fine save from Nwabali in the first half as he shot at goal from a tight angle.

There was also an excellent chance early in the second half when the ball fell to Max Gradel in the box, but his fierce shot was blocked by Calvin Bassey. Haller attempted a spectacular overhead kick, but the ball flashed wide of goal in another chance for the Ivorians, although he did not have to wait long for his goal, which came moments later.

Gradel and captain Aurier were both in the winning side in 2015 and now have two AFCON winners' medals each. The skipper handed trophy-lifting duties to his team-mate, the squad's most experienced player with 112 caps.

Decisive...Haller watches his final-winning goal hit the back of the net

Thrills and spills in the opening rounds

AFCON's biggest upset...Equatorial Guinea celebrate while Ivory Coast's Franck Kessie reacts to his team's 4-0 defeat

GROUP A

Equatorial Guinea's humiliation of the hosts in their last group game, winning 4-0 in Abidjan, rates as undoubtedly the biggest upset in tournament history; rarely has a host nation been so humbled, and never in such an emphatic fashion. The crowd's bewilderment turned into downright anger, as the Ivory Coast players needed a police escort to take them off the pitch amid jeers from those who had remained.

It was an amazing turnabout in a matter of nine days from a bright start for the hosts when Seko Fofana scored after only four minutes of the tournament's opening game against Guinea-Bissau. After a 2-0 win, where the Ivorians looked uninspired but were excused because of the hot conditions, they then lost 1-0 to Nigeria in their second game. The game was decided on a VAR penalty decision, but Nigeria won the tactical battle with an unusual five-man defence.

Equatorial Guinea, who were also giant-killers at the 2021 finals, sent early notice of their potential by holding the Super Eagles to a 1-1 draw, then beating Guinea-Bissau 4-2 with Emilio Nsue's hat-trick the first at the tournament since 2008. The 34-year-old Nsue scored two more in that final riveting victory against the hosts, leaving the Ivorians – who fired coach Jean-Louis Gasset after the defeat – having to wait three days before knowing they had also advanced as one of the four best third-placed finishers.

GROUP B

A dramatic last-gasp win over Ghana handed the tiny Cape Verde Islands a dream start to the tournament and they went on to snatch top place in the Abidjan-based group with two more impressive displays, belying the fact they were the smallest of the 24 competing countries. Bebe's stunning long-range free-kick goal in the 3-0 thumping of Mozambique was one of several top-class finishes, and the *Tubaroes Azul* finished their fixtures by snatching an equaliser against Egypt deep into stoppage-time for a total of seven points.

Egypt came second in the group with three draws. The first against Mozambique proved most fortunate with a VAR penalty awarded to them in stoppage-time that Mohamed Salah converted for a 2-2 scoreline. But he pulled his hamstring in their next game, an exciting 2-2 draw with Ghana, and went back to Liverpool for treatment.

Ghana had to win their last game against Mozambique to be sure of advancing and were 2-0 up at the 90-minute mark. But then Andre Ayew gave away a penalty with an unfortunate handball to allow Geny Catamo to make it 2-1 from the spot, before goalkeeper Richard Ofori conceded a corner that Reinildo headed in from to force a draw and send Ghana home early. Head coach Chris Hughton was fired within days of the Black Stars' demise.

GROUP C

Senegal were the only side to finish the group phase with a 100 per cent record, convincingly beating Gambia 3-0 and Cameroon 3-1 and having little trouble with Guinea in their final game also in

Cameroon hero... Christopher Wooh wheels off after scoring the winner against Gambia

Shock...Algeria finished bottom of their group for the second AFCON in a row

Yamoussoukro. The holders' only crisis came when coach Aliou Cisse needed a night in hospital with a stomach complaint following the victory over Cameroon.

Guinea were well placed to advance after their second game when they gained a measure of revenge over Gambia, who eliminated them in the round of 16 two years ago, setting the stage for a dramatic finale between Cameroon and Gambia. Both needed a win in the final group game; a decade or so ago, Cameroon would have swept the small west African country aside, but the Indomitable Lions saw their early second-half lead overturned as Gambia went 2-1 up with five minutes left. Cue a roaring recovery from Cameroon with the help of a James Gomez own goal and then the winner in stoppage-time from defender Christopher Wooh at a corner.

As a result of the dramatic 3-2 triumph, Cameroon finished second with Guinea going through as one of the lucky losers. Perhaps by design, because they rested key players for their last game against Senegal and thus avoided Nigeria in the last 16.

GROUP D

Algeria were the top seeds in this group and expected to atone for the calamity of their previous campaign in Cameroon two years previously, where they finished bottom of their group as holders. But it was not to be as they went home early again, bottom once more, after a shock loss to Mauritania in their last game in Bouake and seeing the axe fall on the reign of 2019 tournament-winning coach Djamel Belmadi.

Algeria had been in the driving seat until they gave away a needless penalty and allowed Angola to equalise in their opening match. The next game was even more disappointing for the Algerian supporters as their team had to scramble a 95th-minute equaliser to draw 2-2 with Burkina Faso. But few anticipated any problem with getting past Mauritania in their third game given that the Lions of Chinguetti had lost to both Burkina Faso and Angola, albeit the latter game a narrow defeat in a five-goal thriller. Algeria dropped Riyad Mahrez hoping fresher legs and minds might see them through but ended up losing 1-0 and finishing last.

Angola topped the group with a 2-0 win over Burkina Faso, with Mauritania also advancing in a massive leap of progress for a country that won their first international game in 1980, 16 years after joining the FIFA ranks.

> Equatorial Guinea's humiliation of the hosts in their last group game, winning 4-0 in Abidjan, rates as undoubtedly the biggest upset in tournament history

GROUP E

Namibia won their first AFCON game in four tournament appearance as Deon Hotto's swooping 85th-minute header saw them to a 1-0 triumph over Tunisia in the group's opening game in Korhogo.

Mali followed that by beating South Africa 2-0 and went on to win the group, despite drawing both of their next two games. South Africa bounced back in their second game with a 4-0 thumping of Namibia, thanks in part to two goals from 34-year-old Themba Zwane. It was the third time South Africa were able to get themselves out of a sticky situation by beating their northern neighbours, as had been the case in 1998 and 2019.

Tunisia, who had been top seeds, had to beat South Africa in their last group game to have any chance of advancing, but the pair put on a goalless draw devoid of much of the excitement that had marked most of the other group games across the competition. At the same time, Namibia took a point off Mali to secure one of the lucky loser berths and advance to a first-ever appearance in the knockouts.

Tunisia boss Jalel Kadri, who had been in charge when they beat France at the World Cup in Qatar, resigned immediately after their last-place finish was confirmed.

Group E winners ...Mali's Lassine Sinayoko scores against Tunisia

GROUP F

Morocco were the first nation to arrive for the finals and had a week of necessary acclimatisation in San-Pedro, where the heat and humidity was extreme. As a result, they immediately lived up to their pre-tournament billing as hot favourites with a comfortable 3-0 win over Tanzania, while neighbours DR Congo and Zambia drew their opener 1-1 at the Laurent Pokou Stadium.

But Morocco looked decidedly more vulnerable in their next contest, where the Congolese missed a penalty before Silas Katompa's equaliser ensured a deserved 1-1 draw. There was also an unseemly spat on the field afterwards, with Morocco coach Walid Regragui subsequently given a two-match ban. After he was banished to the stands for their last group game against Zambia, he won his appeal and the ban was lifted.

Tanzania's coach Adel Amrouche was also banned – for eight games – and tossed out of the tournament by CAF and his own federation after the Taifa Stars' first game for an interview where he allegedly criticised Morocco's influence over the African game. Without him, Tanzania held Zambia (1-1) and DR Congo (0-0) in their last two games but went home last along with Zambia, who needed a point in their last match to advance but lost 1-0 to Morocco.

Asian champions... Qatar captain Hassan Al Haydos lifts the Asian Cup trophy

The Emirs of Asia

Qatar are crowned continental champions for the second time in a row

Less than 14 months after Lionel Messi lifted the World Cup at the Lusail Stadium, Hassan Al Haydos walked across the podium, Asian Cup in hand, ready to share the glorious moment with his team-mates. There followed an almighty roar from the vast majority of the 86,000 fans present and those watching on big screens or at home around the tiny nation. Qatar had just beaten Jordan 3-1 and won a second consecutive continental title, the first team to mount a successful defence since Japan in 2004, and this time on home soil.

It was five years since the 2019 success just 200 miles to the east in Abu Dhabi. Then the Maroons were dominant in the United Arab Emirates, scoring 19 goals and conceding just one as they swept all before them. This time it was not quite as smooth, but the reward was the same.

"In some matches we didn't deliver our best, but in others we were better and exceeded expectations," said head coach Bartolome "Tintin" Marquez Lopez when it all finished. It is hard to argue with those sentiments.

For the hosts, the triumph helped erase some of the on-pitch pain from the World Cup. Back then, the terrible start – losing with a whimper to Ecuador – meant that there was no chance for the home fans to dream and celebrate, no chance for crowds to carry flags through the souqs, singing and dancing. In the lead up to the FIFA tournament, there had been plenty said around the world at the lack of football culture and history in the country. The poor displays of the national team – also in further defeats to Senegal and the Netherlands – didn't give the locals much chance or encouragement to take to the streets.

But they took to the Asian Cup with gusto. Indeed, the total attendance edged past the 1.5 million mark for the first time in the competition's history. This 29,565 average just shaded that of China in 2004, even more impressive when the Middle Kingdom has 43 cities that have bigger populations than the 2.7 million in Qatar as well as the fact that there were 51 games and not 32. More importantly, it more than doubled the average from the 2019 edition in

Player of the tournament ...Akram Afif hit eight goals

the UAE and in 2011, which was the last time the competition came to Qatar. Maybe the World Cup did have some positive impact on the local football scene after all.

This continental tournament provided the hosts with the time and opportunity for momentum and excitement to grow – on and off the pitch. At the beginning, there were few expectations. Preparations hadn't been ideal, but the build-up for the 2022 World Cup had been seen as perfect as it possibly could have been and we all know what happened then. This time, Carlos Queiroz, the successor to Felix Sanchez who won in 2019 and then failed in 2022, was fired in December, just a few weeks before kick-off. In came Lopez, with a similar background to Sanchez: Spanish and with almost six years already spent coaching in Qatar.

The players have spoken highly of the new man and once the first win came, all looked much better. That 3-0 victory over Lebanon ensured that there was no danger of a repeat of the bad start in 2022. A 1-0 win against Tajikistan sealed top spot in Group A with a game to go and meant that Lopez could rest most of his players against China.

Three games, three wins, five goals scored, none conceded and players rested. It was almost the perfect group stage. Akram Afif was also starting to show a return to his stellar form of the 2019 edition, when the winger shone and provided ten assists, while the defence was looking sound. Centre-back Lucas Mendes made a difference and impressed alongside Almahdi Ali Mukhtar. Almoez Ali, who bagged a record nine goals in 2019, was not as deadly this time but, with Afif so impressive, it didn't matter.

> For the hosts, the triumph helped erase some of the on-pitch pain from the World Cup

They would be needed more and more as Qatar continued into the knockout stages. The last-16 win over Palestine ended in an expected 2-1 win and there was mental fortitude on display in a quarter-final against Uzbekistan as Qatar had to scrap to stay in the game and win on penalties. Goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham was the hero and had a solid finals. Against Iran, the hosts were under the cosh but grabbed an exciting 3-2 win thanks to a late winner from Almoez. Then came the final and a 3-1 victory over Jordan that came thanks to three penalties from Afif who finished as top scorer with eight goals.

At 27, he should be at his peak and has talked about his desire to return to Europe for a second try in the big leagues. Others should join him too. For Qatar, the focus is now on the 2026 World Cup and getting through qualification for the first time ever, which should be well within their power given that Asia will have at least eight representatives in North America. As it is not much more than two years away, this team – which still contains many of the veterans of 2019 – may be able to get there and show everyone that 2022 was not an accurate impression of Qatari football. Asia, however, already knows for sure.

Mastermind... Qatar head coach "Tintin" Marquez Lopez

Agony and ecstasy

LAST 16

If the group stage was full of excitement and drama, the second round didn't disappoint either.

The game of the round was Jordan's 3-2 win over Iraq. It was finely poised at 1-1 until Aymen Hussein got his sixth goal of the tournament with 14 minutes remaining to put Iraq ahead. It really looked as if Iraq were recreating their 2007 triumph but then Hussein got carried away with his goal celebration, which saw him sit down and copy Jordan's first-half ceremony where the players sat down and mimed eating. The Iranian referee had enough and sent off the forward. Jordan scored twice in stoppage-time to go through. Iraq protested the referee's decision, leading the AFC to issue a statement that it was all correct "for excessively delaying the restart of the game". Another statement was made, banning a number of Iraqi journalists who had accosted coach Jesus Casas in the post-match press conference.

Australia's 4-0 win over Indonesia was much more sedate. Indonesia asked questions early on but in the end it was a stroll for the Socceroos.

Tajikistan were celebrating again after a penalty shootout win over the United Arab Emirates, their first-ever knockout stage game. The UAE had equalised in the final seconds to ensure extra-time and penalties, but the Central Asians deservedly triumphed.

Japan were much too good for Bahrain, winning 3-1, and the sight of Kaoru Mitoma coming off the bench to make a difference was ominous for the rest, while Thailand may regret being too timid against Uzbekistan. It was only in the second half that the War Elephants went at the White Wolves, but it was too little too late and Uzbekistan ran out 2-1 winners and looked like a team that could go all the way.

Iran needed a penalty shootout to get past a stubborn Syrian side, a job made harder by a late red card for star striker Mehdi Taremi. Qatar were too good for Palestine, winning 2-1 to put an end to an historic and impressive run.

Then there was South Korea's epic clash with Saudi Arabia in a game that saw Jurgen Klinsmann face Roberto Mancini. This match made headlines for how it ended, but before that Saudi Arabia had much the better of it with young striker Abdullah Radif scoring. With about ten minutes left, the Green Falcons sat back and Korea launched attack after attack and the only surprise was that it took until the 99th minute for the goal to come, through substitute Cho Gue-sung. It then went to penalties and after two Saudi failures, Mancini turned and wandered down the tunnel before Hwang Hee-chan fired home the winning spot kick. The Italian later apologised, claiming that he thought it was all over.

Game of the last 16...Iraq v Jordan was packed with pure drama

Late penalty... Hwang Hee-chan scores from the spot against Australia

QUARTER-FINALS

South Korea did something similar in the last eight. They fell behind to Australia and then got a 96th-minute equaliser thanks to another Hwang spot-kick. Son Heung-min then popped up with a perfect free-kick in extra-time and it looked as if this chaotic Korean team and its brand of "Zombie football" could go all the way.

That meant a semi-final with Jordan who had produced a solid performance to beat Tajikistan 1-0 to get beyond the last eight for the first time ever. It meant more praise for coach Hussein Ammouta and his well-drilled team that was full of energy, movement and ambition.

Japan still seemed to be heading for the final but then the Samurai Blue crashed out to Iran, losing 2-1, and deservedly so. It was another strangely passive performance

Saudi Arabia head coach... Roberto Mancini

Agonising... Iran players react to their semi-final loss

from the favourites who struggled to cope with the intensity of Iran, who were also without suspended talismanic striker Mehdi Taremi. Sardar Azmoun more than made up for that.

Qatar became the fourth semi-finalists but it was a close-run thing against Uzbekistan. The hosts took the lead in the first half, with the Central Asians equalising in the second, while Qatar went closest in extra-time hitting the woodwork. In the penalty shootout, Qatar fluffed two of their spot-kicks, but Uzbekistan missed three to lose 3-2. It was Qatar's worst display of the finals but perhaps the test they needed.

SEMI-FINALS

Such was the demand to see Qatar against Iran, the hosts wanted to move the game from the 44,000-capacity Al Thumama Stadium to Al Bayt Stadium with 24,000 extra seats. That didn't happen and those fans missed a great game with Qatar winning 3-2, though Iran will feel – with some justification – that they should have gone through.

Sardar Azmoun, the Roma forward who had a fine tournament, put Iran ahead with an acrobatic overhead kick, but Qatar hit back through a deflected shot and then a delightful solo effort from Akram Afif. Then, early in the second half, the Kuwaiti referee awarded a very harsh penalty for handball, which Iran's Alireza Jahanbakhsh dispatched to restore parity. It was from then almost all Iran but with eight minutes left Almoez Ali, who netted nine times in 2019 but struggled this time around, produced a fine swivelled finish to score what proved to be the winner. There was still enough time – 17 minutes of stoppage-time – for Iran to come back, and in the final seconds Jahanbakhsh hit the inside of the post.

> It then went to penalties and after two Saudi failures, Mancini turned and wandered down the tunnel…the Italian later apologised, claiming that he thought it was all over

The bigger story, however, was Jordan's amazing 2-0 victory over South Korea. It was amazing as it was completely deserved and should have been more. Tight, aggressive and intense, Jordan were the opposite of their more illustrious opponents. Yazan Al Naimat and Mousa Al Tamari scored two wonderful goals, the Koreans did not have a single shot on target and were simply outclassed. The last image was of an emotional Son saying sorry over and over after the game and the celebrations from a team that had put themselves within touching distance of, until recently, unimagined glory.

Hat-trick hero... Qatar's Akram Afif celebrates scoring his third goal in the final versus Jordan

FINAL

The final did not quite live up to the drama and excitement of the semis as Qatar ran out 3-1 winners over Jordan. That was partly because all three goals for the hosts, playing in front of 86,492 fans at the Lusail Stadium, came from the penalty spot. All were converted by Akram Afif to take the winger to eight tournament goals, enough to claim the Golden Boot.

Jordan only really got going in the second half and were on top when Yazan Al Naimat scored a fine equaliser after 67 minutes. Very soon after, however, Qatar got their second spot-kick and this time Jordan could not get back on level terms and it was all over when Afif sprinted clear of the defence and was brought down by the goalkeeper. For the third time, the winger made no mistake and that was that.

While Jordan will be proud of their efforts in the tournament, they will look back on giving away three penalties – none of which were especially controversial – as the reason they lost in the final, especially the second which came at a time when they looked set to kick on and win. Qatar didn't care and the celebrations went on long into the Doha night.

Emotional opening round

Opening victory... Akram Afif scores Qatar's final goal in their 3-0 win against Lebanon

GROUP A

The Asian Cup version of Qatar was the complete opposite of the World Cup Qatar, as the hosts won all three group-stage games at a canter. Roared on by big crowds, the Maroons were even able to defeat China 1-0 with a second-string team in the final game after already securing top spot. Hassan Al Haydos came off the bench and his first touch was a stunning volley straight from a corner. China left without even scoring a goal in their worst-ever performance at the finals, arriving home to general apathy.

Lebanon were in with a shout of a first-ever second-round spot but despite taking the lead in the final game against Tajikistan with a beauty by Bassel Jradi, then fell to two late goals. It meant that the Central Asians, led by effervescent Croatian coach Petar Segrt, qualified for the knockout stages on their debut appearance. The celebrations on the pitch reflected that historic fact.

GROUP B

India followed China's example by failing to score as well, leading to memes about almost three billion people and no goals. Coach Igor Stimac said that he wasn't a magician but it was all a bit disappointing. Captain Sunil Chhetri is 40 soon and, while the striker is a legend with 93 international goals to his name, he probably should no longer be leading the line.

Australia topped the group, although their players and coach Graham Arnold bristled at criticism from back home on the style of play and performances. It wasn't pretty but it was efficient as the Socceroos collected seven points. It probably should have been six as Uzbekistan deserved to win the 1-1 draw and looked very positive.

There were tears of joy as Syria took one of the four best third-place finishes to progress for the first time. They only scored one goal – Omar Khrbin's late winner against India – but the defence stood firm and did the rest. Syria were always hard to beat, even before hiring the notoriously defensive Hector Cuper, and then did just enough.

GROUP C

Palestine took the headlines in Group C by recording their first-ever Asian Cup win, a 3-0 triumph over Hong Kong in the final game, and that was enough to take them into the knockout stages, also for the first time. It was nothing less than they deserved and the emotion from the players as the final whistle sounded was palpable.

Iranian supporters had chanted for Palestine before the opener but Team Melli were clinical on the pitch, running out 4-1 winners. A narrow 1-0 victory over Hong Kong drew criticism back home but it was all from jealousy according to coach Amir Ghalenoei.

Emotional... Syria celebrate reaching the knockouts

Historic...Oday Dabbagh celebrates scoring for Palestine against Hong Kong

Hong Kong were the lowest-ranked team in the tournament and were well-organised but just did not have the quality.

The United Arab Emirates took second by virtue of scoring one more goal than Palestine. Fans were surprised to not to see record goalscorer Ali Mabkhout, who was left out according to coaching staff for "technical and tactical" reasons. It did not bode well.

> There were tears of joy as Syria took one of the four best third-place finishes to progress for the first time

GROUP D

Everyone expected Japan to finish top of Group D with maximum points. The opening 4-2 win against Vietnam was an 11th victory in a row, but highlighted defensive vulnerabilities and the lack of a top-class goalkeeper. The man between the sticks, Zion Suzuki, struggled in the second game too, a 2-1 defeat to Iraq who simply outplayed the tournament favourites. Memories of 2007 were evoked as Aymen Hussein headed home both goals, and the Lions of Mesopotamia joined Iran and Qatar in winning all three group games, consigning Japan to second.

Indonesia finished third – winning their straight shootout with Vietnam 1-0 – and progressed for the first time ever to wild celebrations back home in Jakarta, a vindication of coach Shin Tae-yong's trust in youth and overseas-born players. Vietnam grumbled about the number of naturalised players used by Indonesia, but that defeat summed up a hugely disappointing campaign for the Golden Star Warriors. Philippe Troussier was accused of getting his tactics wrong and there have been calls for the French coach to be replaced.

Into the knockout rounds for the first time...Indonesia

GROUP E

Just like Japan, South Korea finished second in their pool. Bahrain took top spot thanks to 1-0 wins over Malaysia and Jordan. Full of energy and intent, Juan Antonio Pizzi's team recovered well from their opening-game 3-1 defeat to Korea.

Jordan came into the tournament with just one win in nine matches, but started with a 4-0 thrashing of Malaysia and then were disappointed to draw 2-2 with group favourites Korea. In the end, they finished third and advanced.

Korea had a tough time and followed that Jordan draw with a 3-3 thriller against a Malaysian team ranked 107 places below them. The image of a smiling Jurgen Klinsmann as Korea went 2-1 down angered supporters back home, who felt that the German was relying on his big-name stars rather than a clear game plan.

Malaysia were delighted with their last-gasp equaliser to take a point and ensure that an otherwise forgettable first appearance since 2007 ended on a high.

GROUP F

Oman were the big disappointment. Expected to challenge Saudi Arabia for top spot, they did not even advance to the knockout stages. The men from Muscat struggled to recover from the opening loss to the Saudis when they were leading 1-0 until the 78th minute but then ended up losing to a 96th-minute goal. Kyrgyzstan lost to Thailand and then had two men sent off against Saudi Arabia and lost that 2-0 too. Their most memorable achievement was stopping Oman from progressing, holding them to a 1-1 draw.

Thailand looked solid and advanced with a game to spare but the Saudis took top spot. It wasn't completely convincing as before the finals, Saudi boss Roberto Mancini accused three major players in Salman Al Faraj, Sultan Ghannam and Nawaf Al Aqidi of trying to pick and choose which games they appeared in. This was all denied by the players but it put extra pressure on the team. The Green Falcons reacted by finishing first and looked well set for the knockouts.

Big disappointment... Oman failed to deliver on their huge promise

Europe

NICK BIDWELL

Preview

Potent force at home...Wales will be confident ahead of the play-offs

Euro 2024 play-offs

With 21 teams already qualified and preparing for Germany, the three remaining European Championship spots are up for grabs in March

By March 26, the identities of all 24 teams at this summer's European Championship will be confirmed. In the upcoming play-offs, the 12 competing countries have been divided into three paths of four teams. Each side will play a one-legged semi-final, hosted by the highest-ranked team in the 2022-23 UEFA Nations League, with the winners advancing to a final.

PATH A

Poland, who host the minnows of Estonia in their semi-final, must thank their lucky stars that there is a repechage route to this year's European Championship. Despite much talent in their ranks – notably iconic striker Robert Lewandowski (146 internationals and 82 goals), schemer Piotr Zielinski and goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny – the Poles were dazed and confused for much of their Euro 2024 qualifying campaign, picking up only 11 points from a possible 24 and finishing third in Group E behind table toppers Albania and runners-up Czech Republic.

Poland coach Michal Probierz – who stepped into the breach when previous incumbent Fernando Santos was fired in September – has made a reasonable start, undefeated thus far in four outings. The former Under-21s boss has restored unity to the dressing room and begun the process of rejuvenating his squad.

Few will expect Estonia, who qualified by beating Malta and San Marino to win

Tough to call... Israel and Iceland drew their last two meetings 2-2

their Nations League group, to pull off a shock in Warsaw. In their Euro 2024 qualification group, the Estonians lost seven of their eight ties.

Wales, who meet Finland in Cardiff in the other match-up, will be confident of making their fourth major tournament out of the last five. Should they see off the Finns, they will be on home turf in the final too and, as they proved when beating Croatia 2-1 in October, the Dragons are a potent force at home. The Finns, athletic and powerful, would love to turn this semi into a slug-fest.

A difficult Euro 2024 group awaits the winners of Path A, as they will join France, Netherlands and Austria in Group D.

PATH B

In a dispiriting sign of the times, both ties in this pathway have war as the common denominator. Two years after Russia's invasion of their homeland, Ukraine, who face a semi-final showdown against Bosnia & Herzegovina, will be aiming to bring a little joy to their beleaguered populace, while conflict in the Middle East is bound to be part of the scenery as Iceland travel to neutral Budapest to take on Israel in the opposite half of the draw.

> **Bit by bit, Luxembourg are doing a fine job of shedding their long-held tag of no-hopers**

On the sporting front, the stakes could not be higher for the Israelis. They have never qualified for a European Championship since fully joining UEFA in 1994 and their last appearance in a major finals was 54 long years ago at the 1970 World Cup.

Expect the Israeli-Iceland encounter to be an extremely close-fought affair. When the pair last met in the 2022-23 Nations League, both fixtures ended in 2-2 draws. Iceland coach Age Hareide says everything will depend on two key factors: controlling their nerves and sticking to the game plan.

Ukraine undoubtedly have the edge in their tie in terms of top-level experience, with a host of Premier League players to call on, plus in-form Girona striker Artem Dovbyk. Bosnia & Herzegovina were poor in Euro 2024 qualifying – losing seven of their ten ties – but play at home in Zenica and boast a number of high-quality youngsters, notably Ajax midfielder Benjamin Tahirovic and Red Bull Salzburg right-back Amar Dedic. What coach Savo Milosevic especially needs is for veteran striker Edin Dzeko to bring his prolific goalscoring form for Turkish high-flyers Fenerbahce to the international stage.

The final will be staged either in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo or in Ukraine's temporary home in the Polish city of Wroclaw. Whoever wins this path will join Group E in Germany alongside Belgium, Slovakia and Romania.

Sorely missed ...Georgia's talisman Khvicha Kvaratskhelia is suspended for the semi-final

PATH C

Bit by bit, Luxembourg are doing a fine job of shedding their long-held tag of no-hopers. Over the last couple of years in particular, the men from the Grand Duchy have made huge strides and they will certainly not be intimidated by the semi-final challenge of travelling to Tbilisi to face Georgia. While there can be no denying that Luxembourg will badly miss suspended winger Danel Sinani, Georgia have to contend with an even bigger setback: the ban that prevents Napoli wing wizard Khvicha Kvaratskhelia taking part. Whoever wins will host the final, so the prize on offer is enticing.

In the other Path C encounter, Greece, European champions in 2004, would do well not to take anything for granted when hosting Kazakhstan in Athens. The Kazakhs form an obdurate, tight-knit XI and are very dangerous on the counter-attack. Gus Poyet's Greece can blow hot and cold, but head into the clash confident after holding mighty France to a 2-2 draw in their last European Championship qualifier in November.

The winners of Path C will join Turkey, Portugal and Czech Republic in Group F for the finals.

THE DRAW

The play-off semi-finals will all take place on March 21, with the three finals following on March 26

PATH A

Wales v Finland
Poland v Estonia
Wales/Finland v Poland/Estonia

PATH B

Israel v Iceland
Bosnia-Herz. v Ukraine
Bosnia & Herzegovina/Ukraine v Israel/Iceland

PATH C

Georgia v Luxembourg
Greece v Kazakhstan
Georgia/Luxembourg v Greece/Kazakhstan

CONCACAF

JAMES NALTON

CONCACAF crunch time

2023-24 Nations League finals coupled with the 2024 Copa America qualifiers signal a huge month for football in the region

Preview

There is plenty to play for as the nations of CONCACAF prepare for a March international window in which a trophy will be won and places at the Copa America secured. Participants will have one eye on the present and another on the future amid what is an exciting time for international football in the region.

On this occasion, the undercard contains arguably the more significant matches as the remaining spots at this summer's Copa America are up for grabs in a pair of play-off matches, but first, at the top of the bill, the 2023-24 CONCACAF Nations League reaches its finale.

A champion will be decided from four semi-finalists: the United States, Jamaica, Panama and Mexico. All four games will be played at the same venue, the 80,000-capacity AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, with the two semi-finals on March 21, and a third-place play-off and final on the 24th.

The stadium on the outskirts of the sprawling urban area around Dallas was widely tipped to host the 2026 World Cup final, only to be pipped to that honour by the MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey. The facility in

Rematch...Mexico defeated Panama 1-0 in last year's CONCACAF Gold Cup final

Head-to-head... Jamaica and USA will meet in the Nations League semi-finals

Arlington will, however, host more games at the 2026 World Cup than any other, so this will be preparation for the venue as well as the start of the teams' own World Cup groundwork.

There is plenty to play for before then, including this Nations League trophy itself, in which the United States will be looking to continue their dominance. The USA have hosted and won each edition of the tournament's final stages since the inaugural edition. They won the 2020 final (played in 2021) against Mexico in Denver and the 2023 edition against Canada in Las Vegas.

All four semi-finalists have already achieved something significant in a region that is preparing to host a number of high-profile international tournaments in the coming years. By qualifying for this stage, they secured qualification for the Copa America, which will be hosted across the United States this summer.

It will be Jamaica's first appearance at this stage of the Nations League, arriving at the semi-finals after defeating Canada on away goals in their two-legged quarter-final. With a squad containing Aston Villa winger Leon Bailey, a player who could stake a claim to be one of the best players in CONCACAF, plus a number of other Premier League stars such as Michail Antonio, Bobby Decordova-Reid and Amari'i Bell, Jamaica have high expectations and will believe that reaching this stage of tournaments is just the start.

They will face a United States side that is beginning a second term under coach Gregg Berhalter and is under a lot of pressure to perform on home soil in the coming years. The US player pool is reasonably strong with all types of talents across the board playing all around the world, but there are still question marks as to how to best assemble them as an effective team. Another true star to support Christian Pulisic is yet to emerge, but Fulham left-back Antonee Robinson has been putting in performances at club level to suggest he could be a contender.

The landscape of CONCACAF football ahead of the 2024 Copa America and 2026 World Cup is beginning to unfold

The other semi-final sees a repeat of the 2023 CONCACAF Gold Cup final between Mexico and Panama. Mexico won narrowly on that day thanks to a late Santiago Gimenez strike and will be looking to show that when it comes to tournament play they are still the best team in CONCACAF, despite a perceived recent decline.

Panama have earned the right to be labelled the dark horse in any upcoming tournament on these shores and will be looking to cause an upset. Houston Dynamo midfielder Adalberto Carrasquilla is reportedly of interest to numerous Spanish sides and is certainly one to watch.

Returning to the important undercard, those two remaining Copa America spots will be taken by the winners of Canada versus Trinidad & Tobago, and Costa Rica v Honduras.

This is a big deal for Canada, especially as they are one of the 2026 World Cup hosts. Missing out on the Copa America will immediately put them on the back foot while fellow hosts, Mexico and the United States, get some highly competitive tournament practice.

Canada Soccer recently extended the contract of interim head coach Mauro Biello, who replaced John Herdman after he stepped down to become head coach at Toronto FC. Qualifying would restore some of the optimism in the side that has dwindled since the 2022 World Cup.

Costa Rica are the other team that will expect to progress but at this level of CONCACAF competition, games are difficult to predict and Honduras will fancy their chances.

The landscape of CONCACAF football ahead of the 2024 Copa America and 2026 World Cup is beginning to unfold. By the end of this March window, we will have a better understanding of which teams are well-positioned and prepared to challenge as the world of football arrives in the region in the coming months and years.

Point to prove ...confidence in Canada has faltered

Venezuela

TIM VICKERY

Argentina and Paraguay book their tickets for Paris

South America's two Olympic spots are claimed after qualifying competition

No country has ever won three consecutive men's Olympic football gold medals – and that record will remain intact for a while longer now that Brazil, winners in the last two Games, failed to grab one of South America's two slots in Paris.

Brazil fell on the last day to rivals Argentina, while the other slot went to Paraguay, who, needing to hold hosts Venezuela, ran out comfortable 2-0 winners to win the South American Under-23 Championship.

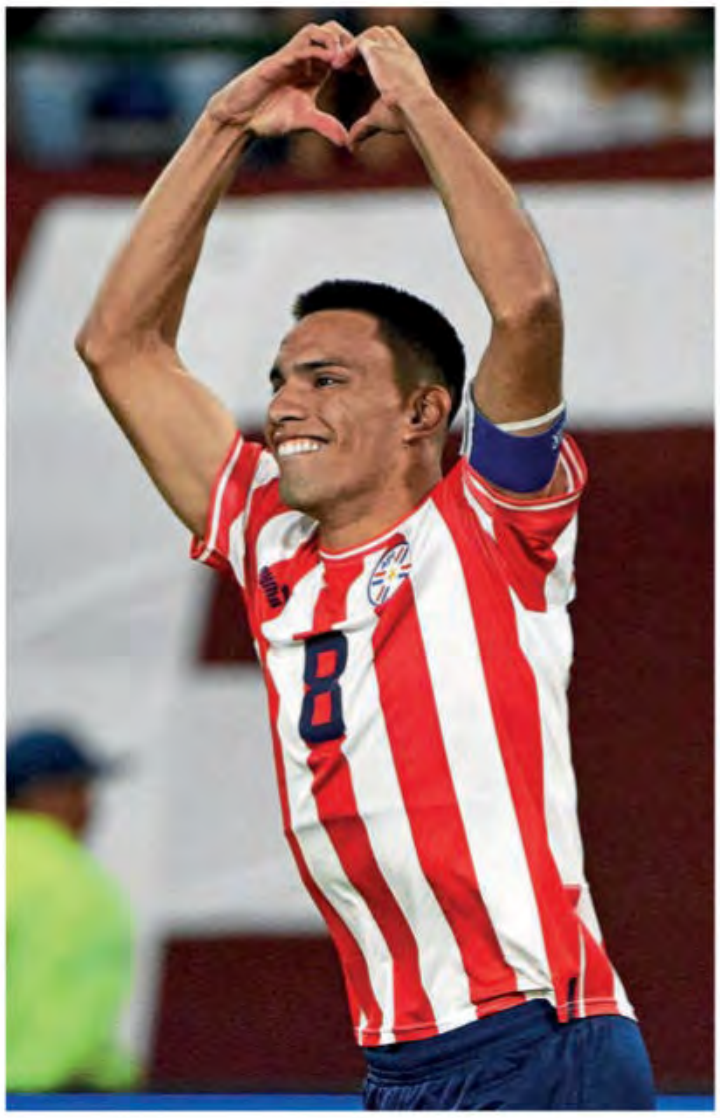
There is a delightful symmetry here: 20 years ago, the same two nations snapped up the Olympic places, with Argentina going on to beat Paraguay 1-0 in the Athens final. Then, as now, Paraguay's coach was Carlos Jara. Then Javier Mascherano was Argentina's holding midfielder, and now he is their coach. Their two teams were comfortably the best on show in Venezuela, and came out on top in an entertaining tournament.

The tournament was divided into two group phases. In the first, the ten teams were split into two groups, with the first and second-placed sides advancing to a second group of four teams.

The pitches left something to be desired. Indeed, the final stage was switched at short notice to Caracas because of the poor condition of the playing surface in the intended venue, Barquisimeto – a late change in a tournament characterised by improvisation. With the competition not being on the FIFA calendar, there are always problems getting players released, and coaches have to work hard to form a team from a group that will not assemble again; the squads of Argentina and Paraguay will probably look different in Paris, not least because three over-age players can be drafted in.

With these limitations in mind, Jara did a splendid job with Paraguay. His side had all the country's traditional virtues – warrior spirit, resilience, strength at set-pieces – but they added a flourish. The midfielders in the 4-2-3-1 system were footballers rather than markers and harriers, and they manoeuvred the ball quickly and efficiently.

Missing out...young Brazil star Endrick



Going to Paris...Paraguay (L) and Argentina (R) sealed their spots at the 2024 Summer Olympics

Argentina were the most attractive side on display, capable of fine passages of play, and were comfortably the top scorers. But for all their flowing football, they found it hard to be consistent over the full 90 minutes. They missed too many chances and could be vulnerable defensively – hence the need for the last-day victory over Brazil, achieved when Brighton-bound Valentin Barco's cross was headed home by big centre-forward Luciano Gondou.

Brazil's elimination comes as a massive disappointment, but hardly a surprise after a thoroughly dismal campaign. There were high hopes for the strike duo of Endrick and John Kennedy but, although neither disappointed, coach Ramon Menezes never found a way to gel the front two with the rest of the team. At the start, with a pair of wingers, it left his team light in midfield. The coach tried to address this problem all tournament – in the end playing Kennedy out wide or leaving him on the bench for the late surge. But whichever way he turned, the circulation of the ball in midfield was dreadful.

This was not Venezuela's problem. Their midfield play was impressive, but they were found wanting in both penalty areas. The hosts were slightly lucky to make the final four, overcoming

Review

Unfortunate... Ecuador should have reached the final four

a Brazil that, with a place in the last round already assured, fielded a side full of reserves. This was hard on Ecuador, who lost out as a consequence, and were surely one of the four best teams in the competition.

Of the others, the most disappointed will be Uruguay, so desperate to reach Paris and celebrate the centenary of the gold medal there in 1924, an event that led to the birth of the World Cup. But it all ended early for Marcelo Bielsa's side after two quick defeats. His side came up with some wonderful moments but were alarmingly open at the back, and the boss picked up a suspension after picking up yellow cards for howling his protests in anguish on the touchline.

Far worse were Colombia, who did not always play badly, but suffered from a recurring problem: no one to put the ball in the net. They finished bottom of their group without scoring a single goal.

Chile managed two victories, but the manner of their two defeats stays longer in the memory. With a couple of notable exceptions – striker Damian Pizarro and defender Jonathan Villagra – they still lack likely replacements for their great generation that came through the Under-20 ranks in 2007.

Brazil's elimination comes as a massive disappointment, but hardly a surprise after a thoroughly dismal campaign

Bolivia were at least competitive, while Peru appear to have taken the radical step of starting from scratch and building for the long term. With a high profile coach in Jose del Solar, they chose to go with a number of players young enough for next year's Under-20 tournament, and so judgement on the new Peruvian generation has to be deferred.

Africa

MARK GLEESON

Al Ahly ready to defend their crown

African Champions League holders advance to the knockouts without dazzling

Defending champions Al Ahly ended the group phase of the African Champions League undefeated but with another laboured performance, although their rivals will know the Egyptians have a history of plodding through the league format before going on to dominate the knockout stages.

Al Ahly finished top of Group D with three wins and three draws but only six goals scored in as many games, securing their progress with a match to spare. They finished with a 1-0 home victory over Young Africans, dominating play but proving wasteful in front of goal with winger Hussein El Shahat scoring the second-half winner.

But it was the first time since 2019 that Al Ahly finished top of their group. In the four subsequent editions, they finished runners-up in their group only to show massive improvement from the quarter-finals onwards and go on to reach the final every year, winning three of the four titles.

It means none of the other seven sides who are through to March and April's quarter-finals will be reading anything into Al Ahly's form.

Petro Atletico from Angola set a new mark as the first side in the 28 years of the CAF Champions League's existence to go through the six matches of the group phase without conceding. They scored five goals, and like Al Ahly won three and drew three of their matches to

Review

Bowing out...last year's runners-up Wydad were a shock group-stage casualty

Top of the group... South African giants Mamelodi Sundowns secured 13 points

Holders...Egypt's Al Ahly topped their group for the first time in five years

finish unbeaten in Group C, ahead of Tunisia's Esperance.

Esperance were one of the four clubs who had previously shared the record for the fewest goals conceded during the group phase, letting in just one goal in the 1999 edition.

Petro Atletico had also secured their quarter-final berth with a game to spare but needed a 2-0 home success over Etoile Sahel, the other Tunisian club in the group, to finish one point ahead of Esperance. That win in Luanda included a first Champions League goal for Jonathan Toro from Honduras, one of several imports that have come via Portugal and significantly strengthened Petro's squad.

South Africa's Mamelodi Sundowns finished the group phase with the most points, registering 13 out of a possible 18, but did lose at TP Mazembe of the Democratic Republic of Congo in early December. That one-goal defeat in Lubumbashi was the only time they conceded.

Once again, the Pretoria-based side look the team to beat in terms of their flowing style of play and finishing. But too often have they impressed in the group competition only to implode in the final stages.

Sundowns' 1-0 victory over TP Mazembe in their final Group A game, which secured top spot, brought about a major milestone for the side in African continental action. It was their 100th victory across the various competitions they have played down the years, by far the most successful South African team, although they have only one Champions League title to their name, won in 2016. Their century of wins have come from 186 matches at an impressive 54 per cent win ratio.

The other group winners were ASEC Abidjan in Group B, adding to the lift that football in the Ivory Coast has had over the first three months of the year, but the real story was the failure of Wydad Casablanca to qualify. They were eliminated courtesy of their head-to-head record with Simba of Tanzania, who finished runners-up.

The three-time African champions (including in 2022) and last season's runners-up have been through three coaches since the start of the season, turning for the fourth time to veteran Faouzi Benzarti who proved unable to conjure up a comeback. They are also significantly off the pace in Morocco's top flight.

ASEC Abidjan lost their last group game to Wydad in Marrakesh but were already through to the last eight, guided by Julien Chevalier. It is the first major job for the 43-year-old, the latest in a long list of young Frenchman who have been given a chance by ASEC to find their coaching feet.

ASEC's 20-year-old centre-forward Sankara Karamoko finished top scorer in the group phase with four goals, but left the club in January – before their final two matches – after being signed by Austrian Bundesliga outfit Wolfsberger.

Tanzania's arch-rivals Simba and Young Africans both advanced as group runners-up, continuing their massive progress in continental club competition in recent years.

Simba finished off their group-stage campaign with a thrilling 6-0 thrashing of Botswana's Jwaneng Galaxy to ensure they finished ahead of Wydad in Group B, while Yanga were second behind Al Ahly in Group D.

THE FINAL STANDINGS

GROUP A

	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
1	Mamelodi Sundowns	6	4	1	1	+6	13
2	TP Mazembe	6	3	1	2	+4	10
3	FC Nouadhibou	6	1	2	3	-5	5
4	Pyramids	6	1	2	3	-5	5

GROUP B

	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
1	ASEC Abidjan	6	3	2	1	+5	11
2	Simba	6	2	3	1	+7	9
3	Wydad AC	6	3	0	3	-1	9
4	Jwaneng Galaxy	6	1	1	4	-11	4

GROUP C

	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
1	Petro Atletico	6	3	3	0	+5	12
2	Esperance	6	3	2	1	+3	11
3	Al Hilal	6	1	2	3	-1	5
4	Etoile Sahel	6	1	1	4	-7	4

GROUP D

	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
1	Al Ahly	6	3	3	0	+5	12
2	Young Africans	6	2	2	2	+3	8
3	Chabab Belouizdad	6	2	2	2	+1	8
4	Medeama	6	1	1	4	-9	4

Fiji

STEVE MENARY

Fiji's time

The Pacific island's ambitious coach is eyeing a spot at the 2026 World Cup

Next generation... Fiji's youngsters at last year's U20 World Cup

With their best chance to qualify for a World Cup finals looming, Fiji are throwing their net wider than ever before to bring in players from the Melanesian island's diaspora.

Fiji qualified for the finals of the Olympic Games in 2016 and have made two appearances at the Under-20 World Cup (in 2015 and 2023) but have never reached the senior tournament.

In the past, the winners of the Oceania qualifying section, generally New Zealand, went into an inter-confederational play-off for a place at the finals, but with the 2026 World Cup expanded to 48 teams the format has changed.

"Now, instead of half a place, we have 1.5 places," says Rob Sherman, a former professional at Cardiff and Swansea, who was appointed Fiji coach in May 2023. "You could claim the one place or the point five. New Zealand are the team to beat, but who knows."

The road to the qualifiers starts in March. Fiji will organise a training camp ahead of the international break, in which they will play a three-match series in the Solomon Islands against the hosts, New Caledonia and Tahiti, their main World Cup rivals behind the Kiwis.

Unlike the other Pacific islands, Fiji rarely engage with the diaspora at senior level, but invites have been extended to half a dozen overseas-based players to attend the training camp.

"We will also invite all the squad that went to the Pacific Games and then depending on availability take it from there," adds Sherman, who lives in New Zealand but spends around 25 weeks a year in Fiji.

The Fijians finished a creditable third in the 2023 Pacific Games in the Solomon Islands, losing to the hosts in the semi-finals. Beating their island peers is the ambition for 2024.

The names of players invited to the training camp have been kept under wraps, but Sherman and the Fiji FA have identified eligible players in Australia, New Zealand and Britain. Defender Scott Wara, for example, was born in Lautoka and plays for Stalybridge Celtic in England's Northern Premier League, while teenager Josh Laqeretabua is with Charlton Athletic in League One.

Laqeretabua's parents are from Tailevu and he was one of a number of overseas-based players selected for the 2023 U20 World Cup in Argentina, alongside goalkeeper Aydin Mustahib and defensive midfielder Caleb Prasad, who both play in New Zealand, and Scottish born Peter Ravai. Another UK-based player, Ollie McFadyen – now at 1874 Northwich – was also called up but did not feature.

Sherman believes more players are out there but the island's eligibility rules are a stumbling block. Only players who have been issued a Fijian passport before they are 18 are eligible, which rules out players from Australia's A-League, such as Central Coast Mariners defender Dan Hall and Ryan Mudaliar, a goalkeeper on the books at Western United. Lobbying for a change has been made, but Sherman says: "We want to look at the boys that we know have passports but I know there are boys that are eligible in Australia and New Zealand and beyond that, I believe, also in Canada and the US."

> "New Zealand are the team to beat, but who knows"
>
> Fiji coach Rob Sherman

Fiji coach... Rob Sherman *Credit: Twitter @FijiFootball*

After the series in the Solomons, the focus moves onto the OFC Nations Cup in Vanuatu in June. Then in the autumn, the World Cup qualifiers will begin and Sherman hopes that Fiji will have their most experienced squad to date at his disposal.

MARCH 15-APRIL 12

Global diary

Games and dates to pencil in for the month ahead

Global friendlies

The FIFA Series, the latest initiative from football's global chiefs, will see countries from all across the world meet each other in friendlies this March (more on page 12). Among the fixtures kick-starting the series will be Algeria v Bolivia, South Africa v Andorra, Equatorial Guinea v Cambodia and Bulgaria v Tanzania.

There are also plenty of inter-confederational friendlies that have been organised independently of the FIFA Series, including England v Brazil at Wembley, Netherlands v Scotland, Spain v Colombia and France v Chile.

Samba stars... Brazil's last visit to Wembley was a 0-0 draw back in 2017

World Cup qualifying

While most of the world's international teams have their attention elsewhere in March, the road to the 2026 World Cup continues in Asia and CONCACAF. In the former, the second round of qualifying (nine four-team groups where the top two advance to the next phase) has already begun largely as expected, with all the usual suspects off to solid starts. Asian Cup finalists Jordan only collected one point from their first two games and will need to revive their campaign with a double header against Pakistan.

Meanwhile, with the Nations League finals topping the CONCACAF billing, only minnows are involved in the region's World Cup qualifiers at this stage. Anguilla will face Turks & Caicos Islands and the US Virgin Islands meet the British Virgin Islands, with the two winners progressing to the group stage, which kicks off in June.

The road to 2026...Japan have made a perfect start so far

UEFA knockout rounds

The final draw for this season's Champions League, Europa League and Conference League takes place on March 15, with the quarter-final first legs all set to kick off in the week of April 8 and the return legs a week later. The semi-finals will also be drawn, meaning every remaining team will know their route to the final.

Copas kick off

After the final qualifying rounds finished in mid-March, the group stages of the Copas Libertadores and Sudamericana will kick off in the first week of April. The draw will take place on March 18, and we'll have a full preview of both competitions in our next issue.

More continental competitions

Elsewhere, with the last 16 and quarter-finals ongoing, the CONCACAF Champions Cup semi-finalists will be decided by April 12. In Africa the CAF Champions League last-eight ties take place over the coming weeks, while in Asia the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League have just concluded. We'll preview the Asian semi-finals in May's edition, while you can keep across all the ties in upcoming Results, Tables, Fixtures.

5 unmissable matches

- **Benfica Women v Lyon Women, March 19**
  Benfica's impressive showing against Barcelona, when they were only denied a 4-3 win by a Lucy Bronze stoppage-time equaliser, suggests they could give the eight-time champions a headache.

- **Wales v Finland, March 21**
  Nothing in football creates tension, agony and ecstasy quite like play-offs. The Cardiff City Stadium is sure to be bouncing as Wales attempt to qualify for their third consecutive European Championship in this semi-final.

- **Manchester City v Arsenal, March 31**
  Are Arsenal any closer to Premier League glory than their last visit to the Etihad, when they were ruthlessly swept aside 4-1 by a Manchester City side destined for the title?

Rematch...Arsenal beat City 1-0 in October

- **Athletic Club v Mallorca, April 6**
  Mallorca will play in their first Copa del Rey final since lifting the trophy in 2003, while this May marks 40 years since Athletic's last victory in the competition – since then, they've lost six finals.

- **Rangers v Celtic, April 7**
  Whisper it quietly, but Scotland has a title race on its hands. The final Old Firm derby before the league splits in two could be decisive in determining where the trophy ends up.

OFC Nations Cup

This summer, the new kings of Oceania football will be crowned, but before then the final line-up needs to be confirmed. In March, Tonga will host the Cook Islands and Samoa, with the team that finishes top of the three-team group securing their place at the OFC Nations Cup in Vanuatu, where Fiji, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, Solomon Islands, Tahiti and the hosts have qualified automatically.

2023 AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS

ALGERIA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Mustafa **ZEGHBA**	(33) 21.11.90	Damac (KSA)
16	Anthony **MANDREA**	(27) 25.12.96	Caen (Fra)
23	Rais **M'BOLHI**	(37) 25.04.86	Chabab Belouizdad
26	Oussama **BENBOT**	(29) 11.10.94	USM Alger

DEFENDERS

2	Aissa **MANDI**	(32) 22.10.91	Villarreal (Spa)
3	Kevin **VAN DEN KERKHOF**	(27) 14.03.96	Metz (Fra)
4	Mohamed Amine **TOUGAI**	(23) 22.01.00	Esperance (Tun)
5	Ahmed **TOUBA**	(25) 13.03.98	Lecce (Ita)
15	Rayan **AIT NOURI**	(22) 06.06.01	Wolves (Eng)
20	Youcef **ATAL**	(27) 17.05.96	Nice (Fra)
21	Ramy **BENSEBAINI**	(28) 16.04.95	Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
24	Zineddine **BELAID**	(24) 20.03.99	USM Alger
25	Yasser **LAROUCI**	(23) 01.01.01	Sheffield United (Eng)

MIDFIELDERS

6	Ramiz **ZERROUKI**	(25) 26.05.98	Feyenoord (Ned)
10	Sofiane **FEGHOULI**	(34) 26.12.89	Fatih Karagumruk (Tur)
11	Houssem **AOUAR**	(25) 30.06.98	Roma (Ita)
14	Hicham **BOUDAOUI**	(24) 23.09.99	Nice (Fra)
17	Fares **CHAIBI**	(21) 28.11.02	Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)
19	Nabil **BENTALEB**	(29) 24.11.94	Lille (Fra)
22	Ismael **BENNACER**	(26) 01.12.97	Milan (Ita)

FORWARDS

7	Riyad **MAHREZ**	(32) 21.02.91	Al Ahli (KSA)
8	Youcef **BELAILI**	(31) 14.03.92	Mouloudia Alger
9	Baghdad **BOUNEDJAH**	(32) 24.11.91	Al Sadd (Qat)
12	Adam **OUNAS**	(27) 11.11.96	Lille (Fra)
13	Islam **SLIMANI**	(35) 18.06.88	Coritiba (Bra)
18	Mohamed **AMOURA**	(23) 09.05.00	Union Saint-Gilloise (Bel)

COACH

Djamel **BELMADI**	(47) 25.03.76	

ANGOLA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Antonio **DOMINIQUE**	(29) 25.07.94	Etoile Carouge (Sui)
12	**KADU**	(29) 30.11.94	Oliveira Hospital (Por)
22	**NEBLU**	(30) 16.12.93	Premiero Agosto
24	**GELSON**	(24) 08.07.99	Interclube

DEFENDERS

2	Nurio **FORTUNA**	(28) 24.03.95	Gent (Bel)
3	Jonathan **BUATU**	(30) 27.09.93	Valenciennes (Fra)
5	**KINITO**	(25) 13.03.98	Petro Atletico
6	Kialonda **GASPAR**	(26) 27.09.97	Estrela Amadora (Por)
13	**TO CARNEIRO**	(28) 05.11.95	Petro Atletico
14	Loide **AUGUSTO**	(23) 26.02.00	Alanyaspor (Tur)
21	Eddie **AFONSO**	(29) 07.03.94	Petro Atletico
25	Inacio **MIGUEL**	(28) 12.12.95	Petro Atletico

MIDFIELDERS

4	Manuel **KELIANO**	(21) 06.01.03	Estrela Amadora (Por)
8	Beni **MUKENDI**	(21) 21.05.02	Casa Pia (Por)
16	**FREDY**	(33) 27.03.90	Eyupspor (Tur)
17	**BRUNO PAZ**	(25) 23.04.98	Konyaspor (Tur)
20	**ESTRELA**	(28) 22.09.95	Erzurumspor (Tur)
23	**SHOW**	(24) 06.03.99	Maccabi Haifa (Isr)

FORWARDS

7	**GILBERTO**	(22) 10.03.01	Petro Atletico
9	**ZINI**	(21) 03.07.02	AEK Athens (Gre)
10	**GELSON DALA**	(27) 13.07.96	Al Wakrah (Qat)
11	Felicio **MILSON**	(24) 12.10.99	Maccabi Tel Aviv (Isr)
15	Zito **LUVUMBO**	(21) 09.03.02	Cagliari (Ita)
18	Jeremie **BELA**	(30) 08.04.93	Clermont (Fra)
19	**MABULULU**	(34) 10.09.89	Al Ittihad Alexandria (Egy)
26	**DEPU**	(24) 08.01.00	Gil Vicente (Por)
27	Chico **BANZA**	(25) 17.12.98	Anorthosis Famagusta (Cyp)

COACH

Pedro **GONCALVES** (Por)	(47) 07.02.76	

BURKINA FASO

GOALKEEPERS

1	Hillel **KONATE**	(29) 28.12.94	Chateauroux (Fra)
16	Herve **KOFFI**	(27) 16.10.96	Royal Charleroi (Bel)
23	Kilian **NIKIEMA**	(20) 22.06.03	ADO Den Haag (Ned)
27	Sebastien **KOULA**	(19) 01.12.04	Sabadell (Spa)

DEFENDERS

3	Abdoul Razack **GUIEBRE**	(26) 17.07.97	Modena (Ita)
4	Adamo **NAGALO**	(21) 22.09.02	Nordsjaelland (Den)
5	Nasser **DJIGA**	(21) 15.11.02	Red Star Belgrade (Srb)
9	Issa **KABORE**	(22) 12.05.01	Luton Town (Eng)
12	Edmond **TAPSOBA**	(24) 02.02.99	Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
14	Issoufou **DAYO**	(32) 06.08.91	RS Berkane (Mar)
21	Valentin **NOUMA**	(23) 14.02.00	Saint-Eloi Lupopo (Cod)
25	Steeve **YAGO**	(31) 16.12.92	Aris Limassol (Cyp)

MIDFIELDERS

6	Sacha **BANSE**	(22) 16.03.01	Valenciennes (Fra)
17	Stephane **AZIZ KI**	(27) 06.03.96	Young Africans (Tan)
18	Ismahila **OUEDRAOGO**	(24) 05.11.99	Panserraikos (Gre)
20	Gustavo **SANGARE**	(27) 08.11.96	Quevilly-Rouen (Fra)
22	Blati **TOURE**	(29) 04.08.94	Pyramids (Egy)
24	Adama **GUIRA**	(35) 24.04.88	Racing Rioja (Spa)
26	Dramane **SALOU**	(25) 22.05.98	Urartu (Arm)

FORWARDS

2	Djibril **OUATTARA**	(24) 19.09.99	RS Berkane (Mar)
7	Dango **OUATTARA**	(21) 11.02.02	Bournemouth (Eng)
8	Cedric **BADOLO**	(25) 04.11.98	Sheriff Tiraspol (Mda)
10	Bertrand **TRAORE**	(28) 06.09.95	Aston Villa (Eng)
11	Mamady **BANGRE**	(22) 15.06.01	Toulouse (Fra)
13	Mohamed **KONATE**	(26) 12.12.97	Akhmat Grozny (Rus)
15	Abdoul **TAPSOBA**	(22) 23.08.01	Amiens (Fra)
19	Hassan **BANDE**	(25) 30.10.98	HJK (Fin)

COACH

Hubert **VELUD** (Fra)	(64) 08.06.59	

Out...2019 champions Algeria crashed out early yet again

Prolific strikeforce...Angola's Gelson Dala and Mabululu

Premier League ace...Yoane Wissa starred for DR Congo

CAMEROON

GOALKEEPERS

1	Fabrice **ONDOA**	(28) 24.12.95	Nimes (Fra)
16	Devis **EPASSY**	(30) 02.02.93	Abha (KSA)
23	Simon **NGAPANDOUETNBU**	(20) 12.04.03	Marseille (Fra)
24	Andre **ONANA**	(27) 02.04.96	Manchester United (Eng)

DEFENDERS

2	Harold **MOUKOUDI**	(26) 27.11.97	AEK Athens (Gre)
4	Christopher **WOOH**	(22) 18.09.01	Rennes (Fra)
5	Tolo **NOUHOU**	(26) 23.06.97	Seattle Sounders (USA)
14	Junior **TCHAMADEU**	(20) 22.12.03	Stoke City (Eng)
15	Oumar **GONZALEZ**	(25) 25.02.98	Al Raed (KSA)
18	Darlin **YONGWA**	(23) 21.09.00	Lorient (Fra)
21	Jean-Charles **CASTELLETTO**	(28) 26.01.95	Nantes (Fra)
25	Malcom **BOKELE**	(23) 12.02.00	Bordeaux (Fra)
26	Enzo **TCHATO**	(21) 23.11.02	Montpellier (Fra)

MIDFIELDERS

6	Olivier **KEMEN**	(27) 20.07.96	Kayserispor (Tur)
8	Andre-Frank **ZAMBO ANGUISSA**	(28) 16.11.95	Napoli (Ita)
17	Yvan **NEYOU**	(27) 03.01.97	Leganes (Spa)
20	Ben **ELLIOTT**	(21) 05.11.02	Reading (Eng)
22	Olivier **NTCHAM**	(27) 09.02.96	Samsunspor (Tur)
27	Wilfried Nathan **DOUALLA**	(17) 15.05.06	Victoria United

FORWARDS

3	Moumi **NGAMALEU**	(29) 09.07.94	Dynamo Moscow (Rus)
7	Clinton **N'JIE**	(30) 15.08.93	Sivasspor (Tur)
9	Frank **MAGRI**	(24) 04.09.99	Toulouse (Fra)
10	Vincent **ABOUBAKAR**	(31) 22.01.92	Besiktas (Tur)
11	Georges-Kevin **NKOUDOU**	(28) 13.02.95	Damac (KSA)
12	Karl **TOKO EKAMBI**	(31) 14.09.92	Abha (KSA)
13	Leonel **ATEBA**	(24) 06.02.99	Dynamo Douala
19	Faris **MOUMBAGNA**	(23) 01.07.00	Bodo/Glimt (Nor)

COACH

Riogbert **SONG**	(47) 01.07.76	

CAPE VERDE

GOALKEEPERS

1	**VOZINHA**	(37) 03.06.86	Trencin (Svk)
12	Marcio **ROSA**	(26) 23.02.97	Anadia (Por)
24	Dylan **SILVA**	(24) 10.02.99	Sintrense (Por)

DEFENDERS

2	**STOPIRA**	(35) 20.05.88	Boavista da Praia
3	**DINEY**	(28) 17.01.95	Al Bataeh (UAE)
4	Roberto **LOPES**	(31) 17.06.92	Shamrock Rovers (Irl)
5	**LOGAN COSTA**	(22) 01.04.01	Toulouse (Fra)
8	**JOAO PAULO**	(25) 26.05.98	Sheriff Tiraspol (Mda)
16	Dylan **TAVARES**	(27) 30.08.96	Bastia (Fra)
23	Steven **MOREIRA**	(29) 13.08.94	Columbus Crew (USA)

MIDFIELDERS

6	Patrick **ANDRADE**	(30) 09.02.93	Qarabag (Aze)
10	Jamiro **MONTEIRO**	(30) 23.11.93	San Jose Earthquakes (USA)
13	**CUCA**	(33) 09.01.91	Uniao de Leiria (Por)
14	Deroy **DUARTE**	(24) 04.07.99	Fortuna Sittard (Ned)
15	Laros **DUARTE**	(26) 28.02.97	Groningen (Ned)
18	Kenny **ROCHA SANTOS**	(24) 03.01.00	AEZ Zakakiou (Cyp)
26	Kevin **PINA**	(26) 27.01.97	Krasnodar (Rus)

FORWARDS

7	Jovane **CABRAL**	(25) 14.06.98	Salernitana (Ita)
9	**GILSON** Benchimol	(22) 29.12.01	Benfica (Por)
11	Garry **RODRIGUES**	(33) 27.11.90	Ankaragucu (Tur)
17	Willy **SEMEDO**	(29) 27.04.94	Omonia Nicosia (Cyp)
19	Bryan **TEIXEIRA**	(23) 01.09.00	Sturm Graz (Aut)
20	Ryan **MENDES**	(34) 08.01.90	Fatih Karagumruk (Tur)
21	**BEBE**	(33) 12.07.90	Rayo Vallecano (Spa)

COACH

BUBISTA	(54) 06.01.70	

DR CONGO

GOALKEEPERS

1	Lionel **MPASI**	(29) 01.08.94	Rodez (Fra)
16	Dimitri **BERTAUD**	(25) 06.06.98	Montpellier (Fra)
21	Baggio **SIADI**	(26) 21.07.97	TP Mazembe

DEFENDERS

2	Henock **INONGA BAKA**	(30) 01.11.93	Simba (Tan)
4	Brian **BAYEYE**	(23) 30.06.00	Ascoli (Ita)
5	Dylan **BATUBINSIKA**	(27) 15.02.96	Saint-Etienne (Fra)
12	Joris **KAYEMBE**	(29) 08.08.94	Genk (Bel)
15	Rocky **BUSHIRI**	(24) 30.11.99	Hibernian (Sco)
22	Chancel **MBEMBA**	(29) 08.08.94	Marseille (Fra)
24	Gedeon **KALULU**	(26) 29.08.97	Lorient (Fra)
26	Arthur **MASUAKU**	(30) 07.11.93	Besiktas (Tur)

MIDFIELDERS

6	Aaron **TSHIBOLA**	(28) 25.01.95	Hatta (UAE)
7	Grady **DIANGANA**	(25) 19.04.98	West Bromwich Albion (Eng)
8	Samuel **MOUTOUSSAMY**	(27) 12.08.96	Nantes (Fra)
10	Theo **BONGONDA**	(28) 20.11.95	Spartak Moscow (Rus)
14	Gael **KAKUTA**	(32) 21.06.91	Amiens (Fra)
18	Charles **PICKEL**	(26) 15.05.97	Cremonese (Ita)
27	Omenuke **MFULU**	(29) 20.03.94	Las Palmas (Spa)

FORWARDS

11	**SILAS** Katompa	(25) 06.10.98	Stuttgart (Ger)
13	Meschack **ELIA**	(26) 06.08.97	Young Boys (Sui)
17	Cedric **BAKAMBU**	(32) 11.04.91	Galatasaray (Tur)
19	Fiston **MAYELE**	(29) 24.06.94	Pyramids (Egy)
20	Yoane **WISSA**	(27) 03.09.96	Brentford (Eng)
23	Simon **BANZA**	(27) 13.08.96	Braga (Por)

COACH

Sebastien **DESABRE** (Fra)	(47) 02.09.76	

EGYPT

GOALKEEPERS

1	Ahmed **EL SHENAWY**	(32) 14.05.91	Pyramids
16	Mohamed **EL SHENAWY**	(35) 18.12.88	Al Ahly
23	**GABASKI**	(34) 29.01.89	National Bank
26	Mohamed **SOBHY**	(24) 15.07.99	Zamalek

DEFENDERS

2	Ali **GABR**	(35) 10.01.89	Pyramids
3	Mohamed **HANY**	(27) 02.02.96	Al Ahly
4	Omar **KAMAL**	(30) 29.09.93	Future
6	Ahmed **HEGAZI**	(32) 25.01.91	Al Ittihad (KSA)
12	Mohamed **HAMDY**	(28) 15.03.95	Pyramids
13	Ahmed **FATOUH**	(25) 22.03.98	Zamalek
15	Yasser **IBRAHIM**	(30) 10.02.93	Al Ahly
21	Ahmed **SAMY**	(31) 01.04.92	Pyramids
24	Mohamed **ABDELMONEM**	(24) 01.02.99	Al Ahly

MIDFIELDERS

5	Hamdy **FATHY**	(29) 29.09.94	Al Wakrah (Qat)
8	Emam **ASHOUR**	(25) 20.02.98	Al Ahly
14	Marwan **ATTIA**	(25) 12.08.98	Al Ahly
17	Mohamed **ELNENY**	(31) 11.07.92	Arsenal (Eng)
20	Mahmoud **HAMADA**	(29) 01.06.94	Al Masry
27	Mohanad **LASHEEN**	(27) 29.05.96	Pyramids

FORWARDS

7	**TREZEGUET**	(29) 01.10.94	Trabzonspor (Tur)
9	**KOUKA**	(30) 05.03.93	Pendikspor (Tur)
10	Mohamed **SALAH**	(31) 15.06.92	Liverpool (Eng)
11	**KAHRABA**	(29) 13.04.94	Al Ahly
18	Mostafa **FATHI**	(29) 12.05.94	Pyramids
19	Mostafa **MOHAMED**	(26) 28.11.97	Nantes (Fra)
22	Omar **MARMOUSH**	(24) 07.02.99	Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)
25	**ZIZO**	(28) 10.01.96	Zamalek

COACH

Rui **VITORIA** (Por) (53) 16.04.70

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jesus **OWONO**	(22) 01.03.01	Alaves (Spa)
13	Aitor **EMBELA**	(27) 17.04.96	CD Soneja (Spa)
23	Manuel **SAPUNGA**	(31) 23.11.92	Polokwane City (RSA)

DEFENDERS

2	Nestor **SENRA**	(22) 04.01.02	Real Aviles (Spa)
3	Marvin **ANIEBOH**	(26) 26.08.97	CD Illescas (Spa)
5	Jose **ELO**	(23) 21.10.00	Merida (Spa)
11	Basilio **NDONG**	(24) 17.01.99	Universitatea Craiova (Rou)
12	Charles **ONDO**	(20) 22.10.03	Huddersfield Town (Eng)
15	Carlos **AKAPO**	(30) 12.03.93	San Jose Earthquakes (USA)
16	Saul **COCO**	(24) 09.02.99	Las Palmas (Spa)
21	**ESTEBAN** Orozco	(25) 07.05.98	Arges (Rou)
24	Hugo **BUYLA**	(18) 08.03.05	Sampdoria (Ita)

MIDFIELDERS

4	Federico **BIKORO**	(27) 17.03.96	Club Africain (Tun)
6	**IBAN EDU** Salvador	(28) 11.12.95	Miedz Legnica (Pol)
7	Jose **MACHIN**	(27) 14.08.96	Monza (Ita)
8	**JANNICK** Buyla	(25) 06.10.98	Logrones (Spa)
14	Alex **BALBOA**	(22) 06.03.01	Huesca (Spa)
20	Santiago **ENEME**	(23) 29.09.00	MFK Vyskov (Cze)
22	Pablo **GANET**	(29) 04.11.94	Alcoyano (Spa)
25	Federico **NGUEMA**	(26) 20.04.97	CSF Balti (Mda)

FORWARDS

9	Salomon **OBAMA**	(23) 04.02.00	Santa Coloma (And)
10	Emilio **NSUE**	(34) 30.09.89	Intercity (Spa)
17	Josete **MIRANDA**	(25) 22.07.98	Niki Volou (Gre)
18	**NOE** Ela	(20) 17.04.03	Numancia (Spa)
19	Luis **NLAVO** Asue	(22) 09.07.01	Braga (Por)
26	Jose **NABIL**	(18) 23.11.05	Cano Sport
27	Oscar **SIAFA**	(26) 12.09.97	Alessandria (Ita)

COACH

Juan **MICHA** (48) 28.07.75

GAMBIA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Modou **JOBE**	(35) 27.10.88	Musanze (Rwa)
18	Baboucarr **GAYE**	(25) 24.02.98	Lokomotiv Sofia (Bul)
22	Lamin **SARR**	(22) 11.03.01	Eskilsminne (Swe)

DEFENDERS

5	Omar **COLLEY**	(31) 24.10.92	Besiktas (Tur)
12	James **GOMEZ**	(22) 14.11.01	Sparta Prague (Cze)
13	Ibou **TOURAY**	(29) 24.12.94	Stockport County (Eng)
14	Noah **SONKO SUNDBERG**	(27) 06.06.96	Ludogorets (Bul)
15	Jacob **MENDY**	(27) 27.12.96	Wrexham (Wal)
17	Saidy **JANKO**	(28) 22.10.95	Young Boys (Sui)
21	Muhammed **SANNEH**	(23) 19.02.00	Banik Ostrava (Cze)
25	Bubacarr **SANNEH**	(29) 14.11.94	Zvijezda (Bih)

MIDFIELDERS

2	Hamza **BARRY**	(29) 03.05.94	Vejle (Den)
4	Dawda **NGUM**	(33) 02.09.90	Ariana (Swe)
6	Sulayman **MARREH**	(27) 15.01.96	Free agent
8	Ebou **ADAMS**	(27) 15.01.96	Cardiff City (Wal)
16	Alasana **MANNEH**	(25) 08.04.98	Odense (Den)
24	Ebrima **DARBOE**	(22) 06.06.01	LASK (Aut)
27	Yusupha **BOBB**	(27) 22.06.96	Kawkab Marrakech (Mar)

FORWARDS

3	Ablie **JALLOW**	(25) 14.11.98	Metz (Fra)
7	Alieu **FADERA**	(22) 03.11.01	Genk (Bel)
9	Assan **CEESAY**	(29) 17.03.94	Damac (KSA)
10	Musa **BARROW**	(25) 14.11.98	Al Taawoun (KSA)
11	Abdoulie **SANYANG**	(24) 08.05.99	Grenoble (Fra)
19	Ebrima **COLLEY**	(23) 01.02.00	Young Boys (Sui)
20	Yankuba **MINTEH**	(19) 22.07.04	Feyenoord (Ned)
23	Muhammed **BADAMOSI**	(25) 27.12.98	Al Hazm (KSA)
26	Ali **SOWE**	(29) 14.06.94	Ankaragucu (Tur)

COACH

Tom **SAINTFIET** (Bel) (50) 29.03.73

Salah stricken...Egypt's talisman missed the latter stages

Golden Boot winner...Equatorial Guinea's Emilio Nsue

Drama...Ghana were dumped out in dramatic fashion

GHANA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Richard **OFORI**	(30) 01.11.93	Orlando Pirates (RSA)
12	Joe **WOLLACOTT**	(27) 08.09.96	Hibernian (Sco)
16	Lawrence **ATI-ZIGI**	(27) 29.11.96	St Gallen (Sui)

DEFENDERS

2	Alidu **SEIDU**	(23) 04.06.00	Clermont (Fra)
3	Denis **ODOI**	(35) 27.05.88	Club Brugge (Bel)
4	Nicholas **OPOKU**	(26) 11.08.97	Amiens (Fra)
5	Kingsley **SCHINDLER**	(30) 12.07.93	Samsunspor (Tur)
6	Mohammed **SALISU**	(24) 17.04.99	Monaco (Fra)
14	Gideon **MENSAH**	(25) 18.07.98	Auxerre (Fra)
17	Abdul **FATAWU HAMIDU**	(24) 04.03.99	Medeama
18	Daniel **AMARTEY**	(29) 21.12.94	Leicester City (Eng)
23	Alexander **DJIKU**	(29) 09.08.94	Fenerbahce (Tur)

MIDFIELDERS

7	Ransford-Yeboah **KONIGSDOFFER**	(22) 13.09.01	Hamburg (Ger)
8	Majeed **ASHIMERU**	(26) 10.10.97	Anderlecht (Bel)
15	Elisha **OWUSU**	(26) 07.11.97	Auxerre (Fra)
20	Mohammed **KUDUS**	(23) 02.08.00	West Ham United (Eng)
21	Salis **ABDUL SAMED**	(23) 26.03.00	Lens (Fra)
22	Richmond **LAMPTEY**	(26) 18.03.97	Asante Kotoko
26	Baba **IDDRISU**	(27) 22.01.96	Almeria (Spa)

FORWARDS

9	Jordan **AYEW**	(32) 11.09.91	Crystal Palace (Eng)
10	Andre **AYEW**	(34) 17.12.89	Le Havre (Fra)
11	Osman **BUKARI**	(25) 13.12.98	Red Star Belgrade (Srb)
13	Joseph **PAINTSIL**	(25) 01.02.98	Genk (Bel)
19	Inaki **WILLIAMS**	(29) 15.06.94	Athletic Club (Spa)
24	Ernest **NUAMAH**	(20) 01.11.03	Lyon (Fra)
25	Antoine **SEMENYO**	(24) 07.01.00	Bournemouth (Eng)
27	Jonathan **SOWAH**	(24) 09.01.00	Medeama

COACH

Chris **HUGHTON** (Irl) (65) 11.12.58

GUINEA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Aly **KEITA**	(37) 08.12.86	Ostersund (Swe)
16	Moussa **CAMARA**	(25) 27.11.98	Horoya
22	Ibrahim **KONE**	(34) 05.12.89	Hibernians (Mal)

DEFENDERS

2	Antoine **CONTE**	(29) 29.01.94	Botev Plovdiv (Bul)
3	Issiaga **SYLLA**	(30) 01.01.94	Montpellier (Fra)
4	Saidou **SOW**	(21) 04.07.02	Strasbourg (Fra)
5	Mouctar **DIAKHABY**	(27) 19.12.96	Valencia (Spa)
12	Ibrahim **DIAKITE**	(20) 31.10.03	Reims (Fra)
13	Mohamed Ali **CAMARA**	(26) 28.08.97	Young Boys (Sui)
17	Julian **JEANVIER**	(31) 31.03.92	Kayserispor (Tur)
21	Sekou **SYLLA**	(25) 09.01.99	Cambuur (Ned)

MIDFIELDERS

6	Amadou **DIAWARA**	(26) 17.07.97	Anderlecht (Bel)
8	Naby **KEITA**	(28) 10.02.95	Werder Bremen (Ger)
10	Ilaix **MORIBA**	(20) 19.01.03	RB Leipzig (Ger)
15	Seydouba **CISSE**	(22) 10.02.01	Leganes (Spa)
18	Aguibou **CAMARA**	(22) 20.05.01	Atromitos (Gre)
20	Mory **KONATE**	(30) 15.11.93	Mechelen (Bel)
23	Abdoulaye **TOURE**	(29) 03.03.94	Le Havre (Fra)

FORWARDS

7	Morgan **GUILAVOGUI**	(25) 10.03.98	Lens (Fra)
9	Serhou **GUIRASSY**	(27) 12.03.96	Stuttgart (Ger)
11	Mohamed **BAYO**	(25) 04.06.98	Le Havre (Fra)
14	Karim **CISSE**	(19) 14.11.04	Saint-Etienne (Fra)
19	Francois **KAMANO**	(27) 02.05.96	Abha (KSA)
24	Jose **KANTE**	(33) 27.09.90	Urawa Red Diamonds (Jpn)
25	Facinet **CONTE**	(18) 24.03.05	Bastia (Fra)

COACH

Kaba **DIAWARA** (48) 16.12.75

GUINEA-BISSAU

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jonas **MENDES**	(34) 20.11.89	Kalamata (Gre)
12	Ouparine **DJOCO**	(25) 22.04.98	Francs Borains (Bel)
23	Fernando **EMBADJE**	(20) 06.07.03	Lugo (Spa)

DEFENDERS

2	Fali **CANDE**	(25) 24.01.98	Metz (Fra)
4	Marcelo **DJALO**	(30) 08.10.93	Palencia (Spa)
5	Houboulang **MENDES**	(25) 04.05.98	Almeria (Spa)
15	Jefferson **ENCADA**	(25) 17.04.98	Pharco (Egy)
20	Sori **MANE**	(27) 03.04.96	Academico Viseu (Por)
21	**NANU**	(29) 17.05.94	Samsunspor (Tur)
22	Opa **SANGANTE**	(32) 01.02.91	Dunkerque (Fra)
25	**EDGAR IE**	(29) 01.05.94	Istanbul Basaksehir (Tur)
27	Prosper **MENDY**	(27) 07.06.96	Olympic Charleroi (Bel)

MIDFIELDERS

6	**NITO** Gomes	(21) 03.02.02	Maritimo (Por)
8	Alfa **SEMEDO**	(26) 30.08.97	Al Tai (KSA)
10	Carlos **MANE**	(29) 11.03.94	Kayserispor (Tur)
13	Carlos **MENDES GOMES**	(25) 14.11.98	Bolton Wanderers (Eng)
16	Morreto **CASSAMA**	(25) 16.02.98	Omonia Nicosia (Cyp)
19	Janio **BIKEL**	(28) 28.06.95	Gaziantep (Tur)

FORWARDS

3	**FRANCULINO DJU**	(19) 28.06.04	Midtjylland (Den)
7	**DALCIO**	(27) 22.05.96	APOEL Nicosia (Cyp)
9	Zinho **GANO**	(30) 13.10.93	Zulte Waregem (Bel)
11	**MARCIANO** Sanca Thami	(19) 06.11.04	Almeria (Spa)
14	Mauro **RODRIGUES**	(22) 15.04.01	Yverdon Sport (Sui)
17	Mama **BALDE**	(28) 06.11.95	Lyon (Fra)
18	Famana **QUIZERA**	(21) 25.04.02	Academico Viseu (Por)
24	**ZE TURBO**	(27) 22.10.96	Nizhny Novgorod (Rus)
26	Zidane **BANJAQUI**	(25) 15.12.98	Feirense (Por)

COACH

Baciro **CANDE** (56) 06.04.67

2023 AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS

IVORY COAST

GOALKEEPERS

1	Yahia **FOFANA**	(23) 21.08.00	Angers (Fra)
16	Charles **FOLLY**	(33) 29.12.90	ASEC Abidjan
23	Badra Ali **SANGARE**	(37) 30.05.86	Sekhukhune United (RSA)

DEFENDERS

2	Ousmane **DIOMANDE**	(20) 04.12.03	Sporting (Por)
3	Ghislain **KONAN**	(28) 27.12.95	Al Fayha (KSA)
5	Wilfried **SINGO**	(23) 25.12.00	Monaco (Fra)
7	Odilon **KOSSONOU**	(23) 04.01.01	Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
12	Willy **BOLY**	(32) 03.02.91	Nottingham Forest (Eng)
17	Serge **AURIER**	(31) 24.12.92	Nottingham Forest (Eng)
21	Evan **NDICKA**	(24) 20.08.99	Roma (Ita)
26	Ismael **DIALLO**	(26) 29.01.97	Hajduk Split (Cro)

MIDFIELDERS

4	Jean Michael **SERI**	(32) 19.07.91	Hull City (Eng)
6	Seko **FOFANA**	(28) 07.05.95	Al Nassr (KSA)
8	Franck **KESSIE**	(27) 19.12.96	Al Ahli (KSA)
18	Ibrahim **SANGARE**	(26) 02.12.97	Nottingham Forest (Eng)
25	Idrissa **DOUMBIA**	(25) 14.04.98	Al Ahli SC (Qat)
27	Lazare **AMANI**	(25) 07.03.98	Union Saint-Gilloise (Bel)

FORWARDS

9	Jonathan **BAMBA**	(27) 26.03.96	Celta Vigo (Spa)
10	Karim **KONATE**	(19) 21.03.04	Red Bull Salzburg (Aut)
11	Jean-Philippe **KRASSO**	(26) 17.07.97	Red Star Belgrade (Srb)
13	Jeremie **BOGA**	(27) 03.01.97	Nice (Fra)
14	Oumar **DIAKITE**	(20) 20.12.03	Reims (Fra)
15	Max **GRADEL**	(36) 30.11.87	Gaziantep (Tur)
19	Nicolas **PEPE**	(28) 29.05.95	Trabzonspor (Tur)
20	Christian **KOUAME**	(26) 06.12.97	Fiorentina (Ita)
22	Sebastien **HALLER**	(29) 22.06.94	Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
24	Simon **ADINGRA**	(22) 01.01.02	Brighton & Hove Albion (Eng)

COACH

Jean-Louis **GASSET** (Fra)	(70) 09.12.53	*(group stage)*
Emerse **FAE**	(39) 24.01.84	*(knockout rounds)*

Simon Adingra...AFCON 2023's Best Young Player

MALI

GOALKEEPERS

1	Ismael **DIAWARA**	(29) 11.11.94	Malmo (Swe)
16	Djigui **DIARRA**	(28) 27.02.95	Young Africans (Tan)
22	Aboubacar **DOUMBIA**	(28) 19.04.95	Afrique Football Elite

DEFENDERS

2	Hamari **TRAORE**	(31) 27.01.92	Real Sociedad (Spa)
3	Amadou **DANTE**	(23) 07.10.00	Sturm Graz (Aut)
5	Boubacar Kiki **KOUYATE**	(26) 15.04.97	Montpellier (Fra)
6	Sikou **NIAKATE**	(24) 10.07.99	Braga (Por)
13	Moussa **DIARRA**	(23) 10.11.00	Toulouse (Fra)
15	Mamadou **FOFANA**	(25) 21.01.98	Amiens (Fra)
17	Falaye **SACKO**	(28) 01.05.95	Montpellier (Fra)

MIDFIELDERS

4	Amadou **HAIDARA**	(25) 31.01.98	RB Leipzig (Ger)
8	Diadie **SAMASSEKOU**	(28) 11.01.96	Hoffenheim (Ger)
10	Yves **BISSOUMA**	(27) 30.08.96	Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
11	Lassana **COULIBALY**	(27) 10.04.96	Salernitana (Ita)
12	Mohamed **CAMARA**	(24) 06.01.00	Monaco (Fra)
21	Adama Noss **TRAORE**	(28) 28.06.95	Hull City (Eng)
23	Aliou **DIENG**	(26) 15.10.97	Al Ahly (Egy)
24	Boubacar **TRAORE**	(22) 20.08.01	Wolves (Eng)
26	Kamory **DOUMBIA**	(20) 18.02.03	Brest (Fra)

FORWARDS

7	Moussa **DOUMBIA**	(29) 15.08.94	Al Adalah (KSA)
9	Ibrahim **SISSOKO**	(28) 27.11.95	Saint-Etienne (Fra)
14	Sirine **DOUCOURE**	(21) 08.04.02	Lorient (Fra)
18	Youssoufou **NIAKITE**	(31) 16.12.92	Bani Yas (UAE)
19	Fousseni **DIABATE**	(28) 18.10.95	Lausanne-Sport (Sui)
20	Sekou **KOITA**	(24) 28.11.99	Red Bull Salzburg (Aut)
25	Lassine **SINAYOKO**	(24) 08.12.99	Auxerre (Fra)
27	Nene **DORGELES**	(21) 23.12.02	Red Bull Salzburg (Aut)

COACH

Eric **CHELLE**	(46) 11.11.77	

Impressive...Mali's Lassine Sinayoko shone for *Les Aigles*

MAURITANIA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Namori **DIAW**	(29) 30.12.94	Tevragh Zeina
16	Babacar **NIASSE**	(27) 20.12.96	Guingamp (Fra)
22	Mbacke **N'DIAYE**	(29) 19.12.94	Nouakchott Kings

DEFENDERS

2	Khadim **DIAW**	(25) 07.07.98	Al Hilal (Sud)
3	Aly **ABEID**	(26) 11.12.97	UTA Arad (Rou)
5	Lamine **BA**	(26) 24.08.97	Varazdin (Cro)
13	Nouh Mohamed **EL ABD**	(23) 24.12.00	FC Nouadhibou
14	Mohamed **DELLAHI YALI**	(26) 01.11.97	Al Hedod (Irq)
20	Ibrahima **KEITA**	(22) 08.11.01	TP Mazembe (Cod)
21	El Hassen **HOUEIBIB**	(30) 31.10.93	Al Zawraa (Irq)
24	Bakary **N'DIAYE**	(25) 26.11.98	Al Quwa Al Jawiya (Irq)

MIDFIELDERS

4	Omare **GASSAMA**	(28) 01.10.95	Chateauroux (Fra)
6	Guessouma **FOFANA**	(31) 17.12.92	Doxa Katokopias (Cyp)
7	El Hadji **BA**	(30) 05.03.93	FC Nouadhibou
8	Bodda **MOUHSINE**	(26) 18.07.97	FC Nouadhibou
12	Bakari **CAMARA**	(30) 04.01.94	Villefranche (Fra)
18	Sidi Ahmed **EL ABD**	(22) 05.05.01	Nouakchott Kings
26	Oumar **NGOM**	(19) 09.03.04	Pau (Fra)

FORWARDS

9	Hemeya **TANJI**	(25) 01.05.98	Al Ittihad Tripoli (Lby)
10	Idrissa **THIAM**	(23) 02.09.00	Al Mesaimeer (Qat)
11	Souleymane **ANNE**	(26) 05.12.97	Deinze (Bel)
15	Souleymane **DOUKARA**	(32) 29.09.91	Magusa Turk Gucu (Ncy)
17	Yassin Cheikh **EL WELLY**	(25) 10.10.98	US Monastir (Tun)
19	Aboubakary **KOITA**	(25) 20.09.98	Sint-Truiden (Bel)
23	Sidi **BOUNA AMAR**	(25) 31.12.98	FC Nouadhibou
25	Pape Ibnou **BA**	(31) 05.01.93	Concarneau (Fra)
27	Aboubakar **KAMARA**	(28) 07.03.95	Al Jazira (UAE)

COACH

Amir **ABDOU** (Fra)	(51) 08.07.72	

History...Mauritania won their first-ever AFCON game

MOROCCO

GOALKEEPERS

1	Yassine **BONO**	(32) 05.04.91	Al Hilal (KSA)
12	**MUNIR** El Kajoui	(34) 10.05.89	Al Wehda (KSA)
22	El Mehdi **BENABID**	(25) 24.01.98	ASFAR

DEFENDERS

2	Achraf **HAKIMI**	(25) 04.11.98	Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
3	Noussair **MAZRAOUI**	(26) 14.11.97	Bayern Munich (Ger)
5	Nayef **AGUERD**	(27) 30.03.96	West Ham United (Eng)
6	Romain **SAISS**	(33) 26.03.90	Al Shabab (KSA)
13	Yunis **ABDELHAMID**	(36) 28.07.87	Reims (Fra)
18	Abdel **ABQAR**	(24) 10.03.99	Alaves (Spa)
25	Yahya **ATTIAT ALLAH**	(28) 02.03.95	Wydad
26	Chadi **RIAD**	(20) 17.07.03	Real Betis (Spa)
27	Mohamed **CHIBI**	(30) 21.01.93	Pyramids (Egy)

MIDFIELDERS

4	Sofyan **AMRABAT**	(27) 21.08.96	Manchester United (Eng)
8	Azzedine **OUNAHI**	(23) 19.04.00	Marseille (Fra)
10	Amine **HARIT**	(26) 18.06.97	Marseille (Fra)
11	Ismael **SAIBARI**	(22) 28.01.01	PSV (Ned)
14	Oussama **EL AZZOUZI**	(22) 29.05.01	Bologna (Ita)
15	Selim **AMALLAH**	(27) 15.11.96	Valencia (Spa)
23	Bilal **EL KHANNOUSS**	(19) 10.05.04	Genk (Bel)
24	Amir **RICHARDSON**	(21) 24.01.02	Reims (Fra)

FORWARDS

7	Hakim **ZIYECH**	(30) 19.03.93	Galatasaray (Tur)
9	Tarik **TISSOUDALI**	(30) 02.04.93	Gent (Bel)
16	Abde **EZZALZOULI**	(22) 17.12.01	Real Betis (Spa)
17	Sofiane **BOUFAL**	(30) 17.09.93	Al Rayyan (Qat)
19	Youssef **EN-NESYRI**	(26) 01.06.97	Sevilla (Spa)
20	Ayoub **EL KAABI**	(30) 25.06.93	Olympiakos (Gre)
21	Amine **ADLI**	(23) 10.05.00	Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)

COACH

Walid **REGRAGUI**	(48) 23.09.75	

MOZAMBIQUE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Ernan **SILUANE**	(25) 09.07.98	UD Songo
12	**FAZITO**	(20) 09.06.03	Ferroviario Nampula
22	Ivane Carminio **URRUBAL**	(26) 01.03.97	Associacao Black Bulls

DEFENDERS

2	**NANANA**	(27) 08.02.96	UD Songo
3	David **MALEMBANA**	(28) 11.10.95	Noah (Arm)
5	**BRUNO LANGA**	(26) 31.10.97	Chaves (Por)
8	**EDMILSON DOVE**	(29) 18.07.94	Kaizer Chiefs (RSA)
14	Domingos **MACANDZA**	(25) 17.06.98	Costa do Sol
15	**REINILDO** Mandava	(29) 21.01.94	Atletico Madrid (Spa)
17	**MEXER**	(35) 08.09.88	Bandirmaspor (Tur)

MIDFIELDERS

4	**NENE**	(27) 15.11.96	Associacao Black Bulls
6	**AMADOU**	(27) 03.12.96	UD Songo
7	**DOMINGUES**	(40) 13.11.83	UD Songo
11	**JOAO BONDE**	(27) 09.01.97	Ferroviario Beira
16	Alfons **AMADE**	(24) 12.11.99	KV Oostende (Bel)
21	**GUIMA**	(28) 14.11.95	Chaves (Por)
23	**SHAQUILLE NANGY**	(26) 24.11.97	Ferroviario Maputo

FORWARDS

9	**LAU KING**	(28) 04.09.95	Sagrada Esperanca (Ang)
10	**CLESIO**	(29) 11.10.94	Honka (Fin)
13	Stanley **RATIFO**	(29) 05.12.94	CFR Pforzheim (Ger)
18	**GILDO** Vilanculos	(28) 31.01.95	Sporting Covilha (Por)
19	**WITI**	(27) 26.08.96	Nacional (Por)
20	**GENY CATAMO**	(22) 26.01.01	Sporting (Por)

COACH

Chiquinho **CONDE**	(58) 22.11.65	

NAMIBIA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Loydt **KAZAPUA**	(34) 25.03.89	Chippa United (RSA)
16	Kamainjanda **NDISIRO**	(24) 01.12.99	African Stars
23	Edward **MAOVA**	(29) 05.09.94	University of Pretoria (RSA)

DEFENDERS

2	Denzil **HAOSEB**	(32) 25.02.91	Khomas Nampol
3	Ananias **GEBHARDT**	(35) 08.09.88	Baroka (RSA)
4	Riaan **HANAMUB**	(28) 08.02.95	AmaZulu (RSA)
5	Charles **HAMBIRA**	(33) 03.06.90	African Stars
12	Kennedy **AMUTENYA**	(27) 15.07.96	Gaborone United (Bot)
20	Ivan **KAMBERIPA**	(29) 03.02.94	Orapa United (Bot)
21	Lubeni **HAUKONGO**	(23) 24.09.00	Cape Town Spurs (RSA)
22	Ryan **NYAMBE**	(26) 03.12.97	Derby County (Eng)

MIDFIELDERS

6	Ngero **KATUA**	(22) 25.07.01	UNAM
8	Uetuuru **KAMBATO**	(25) 24.01.98	African Stars
10	Prins **TJIUEZA**	(21) 12.03.02	Liria Prizren (Kos)
15	Marcel **PAPAMA**	(27) 28.04.96	Jwaneng Galaxy (Bot)
17	Wendell **RUDATH**	(28) 10.07.95	Jwaneng Galaxy (Bot)
18	Aprocius **PETRUS**	(24) 09.10.99	Liria Prizren (Kos)
19	Petrus **SHITEMBI**	(31) 11.05.92	Kuching City (Mas)

FORWARDS

7	Deon **HOTTO**	(33) 29.10.90	Orlando Pirates (RSA)
9	Bethuel **MUZEU**	(23) 22.02.00	Black Leopards (RSA)
11	Absalom **IIMBONDI**	(32) 11.10.91	Khomas Nampol
13	Peter **SHALULILE**	(30) 23.03.93	Mamelodi Sundowns (RSA)
14	Joslin **KAMATUKA**	(32) 27.07.91	Maritzburg United (RSA)

COACH

Collin **BENJAMIN**	(45) 03.08.78	

NIGERIA

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Francis **UZOHO**	(25) 28.10.98	Omonia Nicosia (Cyp)
16	Olorunleke **OJO**	(28) 17.08.95	Enyimba
23	Stanley **NWABALI**	(27) 10.06.96	Chippa United (RSA)
DEFENDERS			
2	Ola **AINA**	(27) 08.10.96	Nottingham Forest (Eng)
3	Zaidu **SANUSI**	(26) 13.06.97	Porto (Por)
5	William **TROOST-EKONG**	(30) 01.09.93	PAOK (Gre)
6	Semi **AJAYI**	(30) 09.11.93	West Bromwich Albion (Eng)
12	Bright **OSAYI-SAMUEL**	(26) 31.12.97	Fenerbahce (Tur)
13	Bruno **ONYEMAECHI**	(24) 03.04.99	Boavista (Por)
20	Chidozie **AWAZIEM**	(27) 01.01.97	Boavista (Por)
21	Calvin **BASSEY**	(24) 31.12.99	Fulham (Eng)
22	Kenneth **OMERUO**	(30) 17.10.93	Kasimpasa (Tur)
MIDFIELDERS			
4	Alhassan **YUSUF**	(23) 18.07.00	Antwerp (Bel)
8	Frank **ONYEKA**	(26) 01.01.98	Brentford (Eng)
10	Joe **ARIBO**	(27) 21.07.96	Southampton (Eng)
17	Alex **IWOBI**	(27) 03.05.96	Fulham (Eng)
25	Raphael **ONYEDIKA**	(22) 19.04.01	Club Brugge (Bel)
FORWARDS			
7	Ahmed **MUSA**	(31) 14.10.92	Sivasspor (Tur)
9	Victor **OSIMHEN**	(25) 29.12.98	Napoli (Ita)
11	Samuel **CHUKWUEZE**	(24) 22.05.99	Milan (Ita)
14	Kelechi **IHEANACHO**	(27) 03.10.96	Leicester City (Eng)
15	Moses **SIMON**	(28) 17.08.95	Nantes (Fra)
18	Ademola **LOOKMAN**	(26) 20.10.97	Atalanta (Ita)
19	Paul **ONUACHU**	(29) 28.05.94	Trabzonspor (Tur)
24	Terem **MOFFI**	(24) 25.05.99	Nice (Fra)
COACH			
Jose **PESEIRO** (Por)		(63) 04.04.60	

SENEGAL

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Alfred **GOMIS**	(29) 05.09.94	Lorient (Fra)
16	Edouard **MENDY**	(31) 01.03.92	Al Ahli (KSA)
23	Mory **DIAW**	(30) 22.06.93	Clermont (Fra)
DEFENDERS			
2	Formose **MENDY**	(23) 02.01.01	Lorient (Fra)
3	Kalidou **KOULIBALY**	(32) 20.06.91	Al Hilal (KSA)
4	Abdoulaye **SECK**	(31) 04.06.92	Maccabi Haifa (Isr)
12	Fode **BALLO-TOURE**	(27) 03.01.97	Fulham (Eng)
14	Ismail **JAKOBS**	(24) 17.08.99	Monaco (Fra)
19	Moussa **NIAKHATE**	(27) 08.03.96	Nottingham Forest (Eng)
21	Youssouf **SABALY**	(30) 05.03.93	Real Betis (Spa)
22	Abdou **DIALLO**	(27) 04.05.96	Al Arabi (Qat)
27	Abdoulaye **NDIAYE**	(21) 10.04.02	Troyes (Fra)
MIDFIELDERS			
5	Idrissa **GANA GUEYE**	(34) 26.09.89	Everton (Eng)
6	Nampalys **MENDY**	(31) 23.06.92	Lens (Fra)
8	Cheikhou **KOUYATE**	(34) 21.12.89	Nottingham Forest (Eng)
11	Pathe **CISS**	(29) 16.03.94	Rayo Vallecano (Spa)
15	Krepin **DIATTA**	(24) 25.02.99	Monaco (Fra)
17	Pape Matar **SARR**	(21) 14.09.02	Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
25	Lamine **CAMARA**	(20) 01.01.04	Metz (Fra)
26	Pape **GUEYE**	(24) 24.01.99	Marseille (Fra)
FORWARDS			
7	Nicolas **JACKSON**	(22) 20.06.01	Chelsea (Eng)
9	Bamba **DIENG**	(23) 23.03.00	Lorient (Fra)
10	Sadio **MANE**	(31) 10.04.92	Al Nassr (KSA)
13	Iliman **NDIAYE**	(23) 06.03.00	Marseille (Fra)
18	Ismailia **SARR**	(25) 25.02.98	Marseille (Fra)
20	Habib **DIALLO**	(28) 18.06.95	Al Shabab (KSA)
24	Abdallah **SIMA**	(22) 17.06.01	Rangers (Sco)
COACH			
Aliou **CISSE**		(47) 24.03.76	

SOUTH AFRICA

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Ronwen **WILLIAMS**	(31) 21.01.92	Mamelodi Sundowns
16	Veli **MOTHWA**	(32) 12.02.91	AmaZulu
22	Ricardo **GOSS**	(29) 02.04.94	SuperSport United
DEFENDERS			
2	Nyiko **MOBBIE**	(29) 11.09.94	Sekhukhune United
3	Terrence **MASHEGO**	(27) 28.06.96	Mamelodi Sundowns
5	Siyanda **XULU**	(32) 30.12.91	SuperSport United
6	Aubrey **MODIBA**	(28) 22.07.95	Mamelodi Sundowns
14	Mothobi **MVALA**	(29) 14.06.94	Mamelodi Sundowns
18	Grant **KEKANA**	(31) 31.10.92	Mamelodi Sundowns
19	Nkosinathi **SIBISI**	(28) 22.09.95	Orlando Pirates
20	Khuliso **MUDAU**	(28) 26.04.95	Mamelodi Sundowns
MIDFIELDERS			
4	Teboho **MOKOENA**	(26) 24.01.97	Mamelodi Sundowns
7	Oswin **APPOLLIS**	(22) 25.08.01	Polokwane City
8	Jayden **ADAMS**	(22) 05.05.01	Stellenbosch
13	Sphephelo **SITHOLE**	(24) 03.03.99	Tondela (Por)
15	Thabang **MONARE**	(34) 16.09.89	Orlando Pirates
FORWARDS			
9	Evidence **MAKGOPA**	(23) 05.07.00	Orlando Pirates
10	Percy **TAU**	(29) 13.05.94	Al Ahly (Egy)
11	Themba **ZWANE**	(34) 03.08.89	Mamelodi Sundowns
12	Thapelo **MASEKO**	(20) 11.11.03	Mamelodi Sundowns
17	Zakhele **LEPASA**	(27) 03.01.97	Orlando Pirates
21	Mihlali **MAYAMBELA**	(27) 25.08.96	Aris Limassol (Cyp)
23	Thapelo **MORENA**	(30) 06.08.93	Mamelodi Sundowns
COACH			
Hugo **BROOS** (Bel)		(71) 10.04.52	

Player of the Tournament...Nigeria's William Troost-Ekong

Previous champions...Senegal reached the quarter-finals

Penalty hero...South Africa goalkeeper Ronwen Williams

TANZANIA

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Kwesi **KAWAWA**	(22) 05.12.01	Karlslund (Swe)
13	Beno **KAKOLANYA**	(29) 27.06.94	Singida Fountain Gate
18	Aishi **MANULA**	(28) 13.09.95	Simba
DEFENDERS			
2	Haji **MNOGA**	(21) 16.04.02	Aldershot Town (Eng)
4	Ibrahim **HAMAD**	(26) 12.11.97	Young Africans
5	Dickson **JOB**	(23) 29.12.00	Young Africans
14	Bakari **MWAMNYETO**	(28) 05.10.95	Young Africans
15	Mohamed **HUSSEIN**	(27) 01.11.96	Simba
16	Lusajo **MWAIKENDA**	(23) 27.10.00	Azam
24	Abdi **BANDA**	(28) 20.05.95	Richards Bay (RSA)
25	Abdulmalik **ZAKARIA**	(27) 03.03.96	Namungo
26	Miano **VAN DEN BOS**	(20) 31.03.03	Villena (Spa)
MIDFIELDERS			
3	Mudathir **YAHYA**	(27) 06.05.96	Young Africans
6	Feisal **SALUM**	(26) 11.01.98	Azam
7	Himid **MAO**	(31) 15.11.92	Tala'ea El Gaish (Egy)
8	Morice **ABRAHAM**	(20) 13.08.03	Spartak Subotica (Srb)
11	Tarryn **ALLARAKHIA**	(26) 17.10.97	Wealdstone (Eng)
17	Sospeter **BAJANA**	(27) 14.10.96	Azam
19	Mzamiru **YASSIN**	(28) 03.01.96	Simba
20	Novatus **MIROSHI**	(21) 02.09.02	Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
23	Ben **STARKIE**	(21) 23.07.02	Ilkeston Town (Eng)
27	Mohammed **SAGAF**	(26) 12.11.97	Boreham Wood (Eng)
FORWARDS			
9	Cyprian **KACHWELE**	(18) 15.02.05	Vancouver Whitecaps (Can)
10	Mbwana **SAMATTA**	(31) 23.12.92	PAOK (Gre)
12	Simon **MSUVA**	(30) 02.10.93	JS Kabylie (Alg)
21	Charles **M'MOMBWA**	(25) 14.03.98	Macarthur (Aus)
22	Kibu **DENIS**	(25) 04.12.98	Simba
COACH			
Adel **AMROUCHE** (Alg)		(55) 06.03.68	

TUNISIA

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Mouez **HASSEN**	(28) 05.03.95	Club Africain
16	Aymen **DHAMEN**	(26) 28.01.97	Al Hazm (KSA)
22	Bechir **BEN SAID**	(31) 29.11.92	US Monastir
DEFENDERS			
2	Ali **ABDI**	(30) 20.12.93	Caen (Fra)
3	Montassar **TALBI**	(25) 26.05.98	Lorient (Fra)
4	Yassine **MERIAH**	(30) 02.07.93	Esperance
12	Ali **MAALOUL**	(34) 01.01.90	Al Ahly (Egy)
13	Hamza **JELASSI**	(32) 29.09.91	Etoile Sahel
15	Oussama **HADDADI**	(31) 28.01.92	Greuther Furth (Ger)
20	Yan **VALERY**	(24) 22.02.99	Angers (Fra)
21	Wajdi **KECHRIDA**	(28) 05.11.95	Atromitos (Gre)
26	Alaa **GHRAM**	(22) 24.07.01	CS Sfaxien
MIDFIELDERS			
5	Mohamed Ali **BEN ROMDHANE**	(24) 06.09.99	Ferencvaros (Hun)
6	Houssem **TKA**	(23) 16.08.00	Esperance
8	Hamza **RAFIA**	(24) 22.04.99	Lecce (Ita)
10	Anis **BEN SLIMANE**	(22) 16.03.01	Sheffield United (Eng)
14	Aissa **LAIDOUNI**	(27) 13.12.96	Union Berlin (Ger)
17	Ellyes **SKHIRI**	(28) 10.05.95	Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)
25	Hadj **MAHMOUD**	(23) 24.04.00	Lugano (Sui)
FORWARDS			
7	Youssef **MSAKNI**	(33) 28.10.90	Al Arabi (Qat)
9	Haythem **JOUINI**	(30) 07.05.93	Stade Tunisien
11	Taha Yassine **KHENISSI**	(32) 06.01.92	Kuwait SC (Kuw)
18	Sayfallah **LTAIEF**	(23) 22.04.00	Winterthur (Sui)
19	Bassem **SRARFI**	(26) 25.06.97	Club Africain
23	Naim **SLITI**	(31) 27.07.92	Al Ahli SC (Qat)
24	Seifeddine **JAZIRI**	(30) 12.02.93	Zamalek (Egy)
27	Elias **ACHOURI**	(24) 10.02.99	FC Copenhagen (Den)
COACH			
Jalel **KADRI**		(52) 14.12.71	

ZAMBIA

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Toaster **NSABATA**	(30) 24.11.93	Zesco United
16	Lawrence **MULENGA**	(25) 21.08.98	Power Dynamos
18	Francis **MWANSA**	(21) 14.07.02	Green Buffaloes
DEFENDERS			
2	Zephaniah **PHIRI**	(27) 19.11.96	Prison Leopards
3	Benedict **CHEPESHI**	(27) 10.06.96	Red Arrows
4	Frankie **MUSONDA**	(26) 12.12.97	Ayr United (Sco)
13	Stoppila **SUNZU**	(34) 22.06.89	Jinan Xingzhou (Chn)
21	Dominic **CHANDA**	(27) 26.02.96	Power Dynamos
23	Roderick **KABWE**	(31) 30.11.92	Zakho (Irq)
26	Tandi **MWAPE**	(27) 20.07.96	TP Mazembe (Cod)
27	Gift **MPHANDE**	(20) 19.11.03	Hapoel Rishon LeZion (Isr)
MIDFIELDERS			
5	Miguel **CHAIWA**	(19) 07.04.04	Young Boys (Sui)
6	Benson **SAKALA**	(27) 12.09.96	Mlada Boleslav (Cze)
7	Kelvin **KAMPAMBA**	(27) 24.11.96	Zesco United
8	Lubambo **MUSONDA**	(28) 01.03.95	Silkeborg (Den)
11	Rally **BWALYA**	(28) 29.05.95	Sekhukhune United (RSA)
12	Emmanuel **BANDA**	(26) 29.09.97	Rijeka (Cro)
14	Edward **CHILUFYA**	(24) 17.09.99	BK Hacken (Swe)
15	Kelvin **KAPUMBU**	(27) 06.04.96	Zanaco
17	Clatous **CHAMA**	(32) 18.06.91	Simba (Tan)
19	Frederick **MULAMBIA**	(21) 10.07.02	Power Dynamos
22	Kings **KANGWA**	(24) 06.04.99	Red Star Belgrade (Srb)
24	Golden **MAFWENTA**	(22) 15.01.01	MFK Vyskov (Cze)
FORWARDS			
9	Lameck **BANDA**	(22) 20.01.01	Lecce (Ita)
10	Fashion **SAKALA**	(26) 14.03.97	Al Fayha (KSA)
20	Patson **DAKA**	(25) 09.10.98	Leicester City (Eng)
25	Kennedy **MUSONDA**	(29) 28.12.94	Young Africans (Tan)
COACH			
Avram **GRANT** (Isr)		(68) 06.05.55	

(ages of 13.01.24)

2023 ASIAN CUP

AUSTRALIA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Mathew **RYAN**	(31) 08.04.92	AZ (Ned)
12	Lawrence **THOMAS**	(31) 09.05.92	Western Sydney Wanderers
18	Joe **GAUCI**	(23) 04.07.00	Adelaide United

DEFENDERS

2	Thomas **DENG**	(26) 20.03.97	Albirex Niigata (Jpn)
3	Nathaniel **ATKINSON**	(24) 13.06.99	Hearts (Sco)
4	Kye **ROWLES**	(25) 24.06.98	Hearts (Sco)
5	Jordan **BOS**	(21) 29.10.02	Westerlo (Bel)
16	Aziz **BEHICH**	(33) 16.12.90	Melbourne City
19	Harry **SOUTTAR**	(25) 22.10.98	Leicester City (Eng)
20	Lewis **MILLER**	(23) 24.08.00	Hibernian (Sco)
21	Cameron **BURGESS**	(28) 21.10.95	Ipswich Town (Eng)
25	Gethin **JONES**	(28) 13.10.95	Bolton Wanderers (Eng)

MIDFIELDERS

8	Connor **METCALFE**	(24) 05.11.99	St Pauli (Ger)
13	Aiden **O'NEILL**	(25) 04.07.98	Standard Liege (Bel)
14	Riley **McGREE**	(25) 02.11.98	Middlesbrough (Eng)
17	Keanu **BACCUS**	(25) 07.06.98	St Mirren (Sco)
22	Jackson **IRVINE**	(30) 07.03.93	St Pauli (Ger)
23	Craig **GOODWIN**	(32) 16.12.91	Al Wehda (KSA)
24	Patrick **YAZBEK**	(21) 05.04.02	Viking (Nor)

FORWARDS

6	Martin **BOYLE**	(30) 25.04.93	Hibernian (Sco)
7	Samuel **SILVERA**	(23) 25.10.00	Middlesbrough (Eng)
9	Bruno **FORNAROLI**	(36) 07.09.87	Melbourne Victory
10	Kusini **YENGI**	(24) 15.01.99	Portsmouth (Eng)
11	Marco **TILIO**	(22) 23.08.01	Celtic (Sco)
15	Mitchell **DUKE**	(32) 18.01.91	Machida Zelvia (Jpn)
26	John **IREDALE**	(24) 01.08.99	Wehen Wiesbaden (Ger)

COACH

Graham **ARNOLD**	(60) 03.08.63	

Aussie ace...Craig Goodwin made Team of the Tournament

BAHRAIN

GOALKEEPERS

1	Abdulkarim **FARDAN**	(31) 25.04.92	Al Riffa
21	Sayed Mohammed **JAAFAR**	(38) 25.08.85	Al Muharraq
22	Ebrahim **LUTFALLA**	(31) 24.09.92	Al Ahli

DEFENDERS

2	Amine **BENADDI**	(30) 09.05.93	Al Muharraq
3	Waleed **AL HAYAM**	(35) 04.11.88	Al Muharraq
4	Sayed **MAHDI BAQER**	(29) 14.04.94	Al Riffa
17	Salem **HUSAIN**	(22) 13.02.01	Al Shabab
18	Mohamed **ADEL**	(27) 20.09.96	Al Khaldiya
19	Hazza **ALI**	(28) 09.06.95	Al Riffa
23	Abdullah **AL KHULASI**	(20) 02.09.03	Al Muharraq
26	Hussain **AL EKER**	(22) 30.09.01	Al Riffa

MIDFIELDERS

5	Mohamed **ABDULWAHAB**	(34) 13.11.89	Al Najma
6	Mohamed **AL HARDAN**	(26) 06.10.97	Al Khaldiya
7	Ali **MADAN**	(28) 30.11.95	Ajman (UAE)
8	Mohamed **MARHOON**	(25) 12.02.98	Kuwait SC (Kuw)
10	Komail **AL ASWAD**	(29) 08.04.94	Al Riffa
11	Ebrahim **AL KHATTAL**	(23) 19.09.00	Manama
12	Ali **HASSAN**	(24) 21.05.99	Al Riffa
13	Moses **ATEDE**	(26) 17.12.97	Sitra
15	Jasim **AL SHAIKH**	(27) 01.02.96	Al Riffa
16	Mohammed Abdul **QAYOOM**	(22) 04.06.01	Al Riffa
24	Jasim Khlaif **AL SALAMA**	(25) 22.02.98	East Riffa
25	Ibrahim **AL WALI**	(26) 12.06.97	Al Najma

FORWARDS

9	Abdulla **YUSUF HELAL**	(30) 12.06.93	Mlada Boleslav (Cze)
14	Abdullah **AL HASHASH**	(31) 17.08.92	Al Ahli
20	Mahdi **HUMAIDAN**	(30) 19.05.93	Al Khaldiya

COACH

Juan Antonio **PIZZI** (Spa)	(55) 07.06.68	

Group E winners...Bahrain made it to the round of 16

CHINA

GOALKEEPERS

1	**YAN** Junling	(32) 28.01.91	Shanghai Port
12	**JIAN** Tao	(22) 22.06.01	Chengdu Rongcheng
14	**WANG** Dalei	(35) 10.01.89	Shandong Taishan
25	**LIU** Dianzuo	(33) 25.06.90	Wuhan Three Towns

DEFENDERS

2	**JIANG** Guangtai	(29) 30.05.94	Shanghai Port
3	**ZHU** Chenjie	(23) 23.08.00	Shanghai Shenhua
4	**LI** Lei	(31) 30.05.92	Beijing Guoan
5	**ZHANG** Linpeng	(34) 09.05.89	Shanghai Port
13	**XU** Haofeng	(24) 27.01.99	Shenzhen FC
19	**LIU** Yang	(28) 17.06.95	Shandong Taishan
22	**WU** Shaocong	(23) 20.03.00	Genclerbirligi (Tur)
24	**JIANG** Shenglong	(23) 24.12.00	Shanghai Shenhua

MIDFIELDERS

6	**WANG** Shangyuan	(30) 02.06.93	Henan
8	**XU** Xin	(29) 19.04.94	Shanghai Port
10	**XIE** Pengfei	(30) 29.06.93	Wuhan Three Towns
15	**WU** Xi	(34) 19.02.89	Shanghai Shenhua
16	**GAO** Tianyi	(25) 01.07.98	Beijing Guoan
17	**CHEN** Pu	(26) 15.01.97	Shandong Taishan
18	**DAI** Weijun	(24) 25.07.99	Shanghai Shenhua
21	**LIU** Binbin	(30) 16.06.93	Shandong Taishan
23	**LIN** Liangming	(26) 04.06.97	Dalian Pro
26	**WANG** Qiuming	(31) 09.01.93	Tianjin Jinmen Tiger

FORWARDS

7	**WU** Lei	(32) 19.11.91	Shanghai Port
9	**ZHANG** Yuning	(27) 05.01.97	Beijing Guoan
11	**TAN** Long	(35) 01.04.88	Changchun Yatai
20	**WEI** Shihao	(28) 08.04.95	Wuhan Three Towns

COACH

Aleksandar **JANKOVIC** (Srb)	(51) 06.05.72	

Dejected...China failed to score a single goal at the finals

HONG KONG

GOALKEEPERS

1	**YAPP** Hung Fai	(33) 21.03.90	Eastern
18	**NG** Wai Him	(21) 30.06.02	Southern
19	**TSE** Ka Wing	(24) 04.09.99	Tai Po

DEFENDERS

2	Sean **TSE**	(31) 03.05.92	Radcliffe (Eng)
3	Oliver **GERBIG**	(25) 12.12.98	Kitchee
4	Vas **NUNEZ**	(28) 22.11.95	Guangxi Pingguo Haliao (Chn)
5	**HELIO**	(37) 31.01.86	Kitchee
7	**LAW** Tsz Chun	(26) 02.03.97	Kitchee
13	**LI** Ngai Hoi	(29) 15.10.94	Rangers
17	**SHINICHI** Chan	(21) 05.09.02	Kitchee
21	**YUE** Tze Nam	(25) 12.05.98	Meizhou Hakka (Chn)

MIDFIELDERS

6	**WU** Chun Ming	(26) 21.11.97	Lee Man
8	**TAN** Chun Lok	(27) 15.01.96	Kitchee
10	**WONG** Wai	(31) 17.09.92	Lee Man
12	**LAM** Hin Ting	(24) 09.12.99	Rangers
15	**CHANG** Hei Yin	(23) 06.04.00	Lee Man
16	**CHAN** Siu Kwan	(31) 01.08.92	Tai Po
22	**YU** Joy Yin	(22) 08.10.01	Eastern
24	**JU** Yingzhi	(36) 24.07.87	Southern

FORWARDS

9	Matt **ORR**	(27) 01.01.97	Shenzhen Peng City (Chn)
11	**EVERTON** Camargo	(32) 25.05.91	Lee Man
14	**POON** Pui Hin	(23) 03.10.00	Kitchee
20	**MICHAEL** Udebuluzor	(19) 01.04.04	Ingolstadt (Ger)
23	**SUN** Ming Him	(23) 19.06.00	Eastern
25	**STEFAN** Pereira	(35) 16.04.88	Southern
26	**JUNIOR**	(33) 11.12.90	Kitchee

COACH

Jorn **ANDERSEN** (Nor)	(60) 03.02.63	

INDIA

GOALKEEPERS

1	**GURPREET** Singh Sandhu	(31) 03.02.92	Bengaluru
13	Vishal **KAITH**	(27) 22.07.96	Mohun Bagan
23	**AMRINDER** Singh	(30) 27.05.93	Odisha

DEFENDERS

2	**RAHUL** Bheke	(33) 06.12.90	Mumbai City
3	**SUBHASISH** Bose	(28) 18.08.95	Mohun Bagan
4	**LALCHUNGNUNGA**	(23) 25.12.00	East Bengal
5	Sandesh **JHINGAN**	(30) 21.07.93	Goa
6	Akash **MISHRA**	(22) 27.11.01	Mumbai City
20	**PRITAM** Kotal	(30) 08.09.93	Kerala Blasters
21	Nikhil **POOJARY**	(28) 03.09.95	Hyderabad
22	**MEHTAB** Singh	(25) 05.05.98	Mumbai City

MIDFIELDERS

7	Anirudh **THAPA**	(25) 15.01.98	Mohun Bagan
8	**SURESH** Singh Wangjam	(23) 07.08.00	Bengaluru
10	**BRANDON** Fernandes	(29) 20.09.94	Goa
12	**LISTON** Colaco	(25) 12.11.98	Mohun Bagan
14	**NAOREM** Mahesh Singh	(24) 01.03.99	East Bengal
15	**UDANTA** Singh Kumam	(27) 14.06.96	Goa
16	**RAHUL** KP	(23) 16.02.00	Kerala Blasters
17	Lallianzuala **CHHANGTE**	(26) 08.06.97	Mumbai City
18	**SAHAL** Abdul Samad	(26) 01.04.97	Mohun Bagan
19	Lalengmawia Ralte **APUIA**	(23) 17.10.00	Mumbai City
25	Deepak **TANGRI**	(24) 01.02.99	Mohun Bagan

FORWARDS

9	**MANVIR** Singh	(28) 07.11.95	Mohun Bagan
11	Sunil **CHHETRI**	(39) 03.08.84	Bengaluru
24	**VIKRAM** Partap Singh	(21) 16.01.02	Mumbai City
26	Ishan **PANDITA**	(25) 26.05.98	Kerala Blasters

COACH

Igor **STIMAC** (Cro)	(56) 06.09.67	

INDONESIA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Muhammad **RIYANDI**	(24) 03.01.00	Persis Solo
21	**ERNANDO** Ari	(21) 27.02.02	Persebaya
26	**NADEO** Argawinata	(26) 09.03.97	Borneo Samarinda

DEFENDERS

3	Elkan **BAGGOTT**	(21) 23.10.02	Ipswich Town (Eng)
4	Jordi **AMAT**	(31) 21.03.92	Johor Darul Ta'zim (Mas)
5	Rizky **RIDHO**	(22) 21.11.01	Persija Jakarta
6	Sandy **WALSH**	(28) 14.03.95	Mechelen (Bel)
12	Pratama **ARHAN**	(22) 21.12.01	Tokyo Verdy (Jpn)
13	**EDO** Febriansah	(26) 25.07.97	Persib Bandung
14	**ASNAWI** Mangkualam	(24) 04.10.99	Jeonnam Dragons (Kor)
19	**WAHYU** Prasetyo	(25) 21.03.98	PSIS Semarang
20	Shayne **PATTYNAMA**	(25) 11.08.98	Viking (Nor)
25	Justin **HUBNER**	(20) 14.09.03	Wolves (Eng)

MIDFIELDERS

7	**MARSELINO** Ferdinan	(19) 09.09.04	Deinze (Bel)
8	**WITAN** Sulaeman	(22) 08.10.01	Bhayangkara
10	**EGY** Maulana Vikri	(23) 07.07.00	Dewa United
15	Ricky **KAMBUAYA**	(27) 05.05.96	Dewa United
17	Adam **ALIS**	(30) 19.12.93	Borneo Samarinda
23	Marc **KLOK**	(30) 20.04.93	Persib Bandung
24	**IVAR** Jenner	(20) 10.01.04	Utrecht (Ned)

FORWARDS

2	Yakob **SAYURI**	(26) 22.09.97	PSM Makassar
9	Dimas **DRAJAD**	(26) 30.03.97	Persikabo 1973
11	Rafael **STRUICK**	(20) 27.03.03	ADO Den Haag (Ned)
16	**HOKKY** Caraka	(19) 21.08.04	PSS Sleman
18	Ramadhan **SANANTA**	(21) 27.11.02	Persis Solo
22	**DENDY** Sulistyawan	(27) 12.10.96	Bhayangkara

COACH

SHIN Tae-yong (Kor)	(53) 30.05.70	

IRAN

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Alireza **BEIRANVAND**	(31) 21.09.92	Persepolis
12	Payam **NIAZMAND**	(28) 06.04.95	Sepahan
22	Hossein **HOSSEINI**	(31) 30.06.92	Esteghlal
DEFENDERS			
2	Sadegh **MOHARRAMI**	(27) 01.03.96	Dinamo Zagreb (Cro)
4	Shojae **KHALILZADEH**	(34) 14.05.89	Tractor
5	Milad **MOHAMMADI**	(30) 29.09.93	AEK Athens (Gre)
13	Hossein **KANANI**	(29) 23.03.94	Persepolis
19	Majid **HOSSEINI**	(27) 20.06.96	Kayserispor (Tur)
23	Ramin **REZAEIAN**	(33) 21.03.90	Sepahan
24	Aria **YOUSEFI**	(21) 22.04.02	Sepahan
25	Saman **FALLAH**	(22) 12.05.01	Gol Gohar
MIDFIELDERS			
3	Ehsan **HAJISAFI**	(33) 25.02.90	AEK Athens (Gre)
6	Saeid **EZATOLAHI**	(27) 01.10.96	Vejle (Den)
7	Alireza **JAHANBAKHSH**	(30) 11.08.93	Feyenoord (Ned)
8	Omid **EBRAHIMI**	(36) 15.09.87	Al Shamal (Qat)
14	Saman **GHODDOS**	(30) 06.09.93	Brentford (Eng)
15	Rouzbeh **CHESHMI**	(30) 24.07.93	Esteghlal
16	Mehdi **TORABI**	(29) 10.09.94	Persepolis
17	Ali **GHOLIZADEH**	(27) 10.03.96	Lech Poznan (Pol)
21	Mohammad **MOHEBI**	(25) 20.12.98	Rostov (Rus)
FORWARDS			
9	Mehdi **TAREMI**	(31) 18.07.92	Porto (Por)
10	Karim **ANSARIFARD**	(33) 03.04.90	Omonia Nicosia (Cyp)
11	Reza **ASADI**	(27) 17.01.96	Sepahan
18	Mehdi **GHAYEDI**	(25) 05.12.98	Ittihad Kalba (UAE)
20	Sardar **AZMOUN**	(29) 01.01.95	Roma (Ita)
26	Shahriyar **MOGHANLOU**	(29) 21.12.94	Sepahan
COACH			
	Amir **GHALENOEI**	(60) 22.11.63	

IRAQ

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Fahad **TALIB**	(29) 21.10.94	Sanat Naft Abadan (Irn)
12	Jalal **HASSAN**	(32) 18.05.91	Al Zawraa
22	Ahmed **BASIL**	(27) 19.08.96	Al Shorta
DEFENDERS			
2	Rebin **SULAKA**	(31) 12.04.92	IF Brommapojkarna (Swe)
3	Hussein **ALI**	(21) 01.03.02	Heerenveen (Ned)
4	Suad **NATIQ**	(29) 19.03.94	Abha (KSA)
5	Frans **PUTROS**	(30) 14.07.93	Port (Tha)
6	Ali **ADNAN**	(30) 19.12.93	Mes Rafsanjan (Irn)
15	Allan **MOHIDEEN**	(30) 11.11.93	Utsiktens BK (Swe)
23	Merchas **DOSKI**	(24) 07.12.99	Slovacko (Cze)
24	Zaid **TAHSEEN**	(22) 29.01.01	Al Talaba
25	Ahmed **YAHYA**	(26) 27.05.97	Al Shorta
MIDFIELDERS			
7	Youssef **AMYN**	(20) 21.08.03	Eintracht Braunschweig (Ger)
8	Ibrahim **BAYESH**	(23) 01.05.00	Al Quwa Al Jawiya
11	Zidane **IQBAL**	(20) 27.04.03	Utrecht (Ned)
13	Bashar **RESAN**	(27) 22.12.96	Qatar SC (Qat)
14	Akam **HASHIM**	(25) 16.08.98	Erbil
16	Amir **AL AMMARI**	(26) 27.07.97	Halmstads (Swe)
17	Ali **JASIM**	(19) 20.01.04	Al Quwa Al Jawiya
19	Danilo **AL SAED**	(24) 24.02.99	Sandefjord (Nor)
20	Osama **RASHID**	(31) 13.01.92	Vizela (Por)
21	Ahmad **ALLEE**	(27) 29.04.96	Rouen (Fra)
26	Montader **MADJED**	(18) 24.04.05	Hammarby (Swe)
FORWARDS			
9	Ali **AL HAMADI**	(21) 01.03.02	AFC Wimbledon (Eng)
10	Mohanad **ALI**	(23) 20.06.00	Al Shorta
18	Aymen **HUSSEIN**	(27) 22.03.96	Al Quwa Al Jawiya
COACH			
	Jesus **CASAS** (Spa)	(50) 23.10.73	

JAPAN

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Daiya **MAEKAWA**	(29) 08.09.94	Vissel Kobe
12	Taishi Brandon **NOZAWA**	(21) 25.12.02	FC Tokyo
23	Zion **SUZUKI**	(21) 21.08.02	Sint-Truiden (Bel)
DEFENDERS			
2	Yukinari **SUGAWARA**	(23) 28.06.00	AZ (Ned)
3	Shogo **TANIGUCHI**	(32) 15.07.91	Al Rayyan (Qat)
4	Ko **ITAKURA**	(26) 27.01.97	Borussia M'Gladbach (Ger)
15	Koki **MACHIDA**	(26) 25.08.97	Union Saint-Gilloise (Bel)
16	Seiya **MAIKUMA**	(26) 16.10.97	Cerezo Osaka
19	Yuta **NAKAYAMA**	(26) 16.02.97	Huddersfield Town (Eng)
21	Hiroki **ITO**	(24) 12.05.99	Stuttgart (Ger)
22	Takehiro **TOMIYASU**	(25) 05.11.98	Arsenal (Eng)
24	Tsuyoshi **WATANABE**	(26) 05.02.97	Gent (Bel)
MIDFIELDERS			
5	Hidemasa **MORITA**	(28) 10.05.95	Sporting (Por)
6	Wataru **ENDO**	(30) 09.02.93	Liverpool (Eng)
7	Kaoru **MITOMA**	(26) 20.05.97	Brighton & Hove Albion (Eng)
8	Takumi **MINAMINO**	(28) 16.01.95	Monaco (Fra)
10	Ritsu **DOAN**	(25) 16.06.98	Freiburg (Ger)
13	Keito **NAKAMURA**	(23) 28.07.00	Reims (Fra)
14	Junya **ITO**	(30) 09.03.93	Reims (Fra)
17	Reo **HATATE**	(26) 21.11.97	Celtic (Sco)
20	Takefusa **KUBO**	(22) 04.06.01	Real Sociedad (Spa)
26	Kaishu **SANO**	(23) 30.12.00	Kashima Antlers
FORWARDS			
9	Ayase **UEDA**	(25) 28.08.98	Feyenoord (Ned)
11	Mao **HOSOYA**	(22) 07.09.01	Kashiwa Reysol
18	Takuma **ASANO**	(29) 10.11.94	Bochum (Ger)
25	Daizen **MAEDA**	(26) 20.10.97	Celtic (Sco)
COACH			
	Hajime **MORIYASU**	(55) 23.08.68	

Prolific...Yazan Al Naimat impressed for finalists Jordan

Goal machine...Aymen Hussein scored six goals for Iraq

Favourites...Samurai Blue failed to live up to expectations

JORDAN

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Yazeed **ABULAILA**	(31) 08.01.93	Al Jabalain (KSA)
12	Abdallah **AL FAKHORI**	(23) 22.01.00	Al Wehdat
22	Ahmad **JUAIDI**	(22) 09.04.01	Shabab Al Ordon
DEFENDERS			
2	Mohammad **ABU HASHEESH**	(28) 09.05.95	Al Ahed (Lbn)
3	Abdallah **NASIB**	(29) 25.02.94	Al Hussein
4	**BARA** Marei	(29) 15.04.94	Al Faisaly
5	Yazan **AL ARAB**	(27) 31.01.96	Al Shorta (Irq)
16	Feras **SHILBAYA**	(30) 27.11.93	Al Wehdat
17	Salem **AL AJALIN**	(35) 18.02.88	Al Faisaly
19	Anas **BANI YASEEN**	(35) 29.11.88	Al Faisaly
23	Ehsan **HADDAD**	(29) 05.02.94	Al Faisaly
MIDFIELDERS			
6	Mohannad **ABU TAHA**	(20) 02.02.03	Al Wehdat
7	Mohammad **ABU ZRAIQ**	(26) 30.12.97	Al Ahli Tripoli (Lby)
8	Noor **AL RAWABDEH**	(26) 24.02.97	Selangor (Mas)
10	Mousa **AL TAMARI**	(26) 10.06.97	Montpellier (Fra)
13	Mahmoud **AL MARDI**	(30) 06.10.93	Al Hussein
14	Raja'ei **AYED**	(30) 25.07.93	Al Hussein
15	Ibrahim **SADEH**	(23) 27.04.00	Al Khor (Qat)
18	Saleh **RATIB**	(29) 18.12.94	Al Wehdat
21	Nizar **AL RASHDAN**	(24) 23.03.99	Al Faisaly
24	Yousef **ABU JALBOUSH**	(25) 15.06.98	Al Faisaly
25	Anas Ahmad **AL AWADAT**	(25) 29.05.98	Al Wehdat
26	Fadi **AWAD**	(30) 26.03.93	PDRM (Mas)
FORWARDS			
9	Ali **OLWAN**	(23) 26.03.00	Al Shamal (Qat)
11	Yazan **AL NAIMAT**	(24) 04.06.99	Al Ahli SC (Qat)
20	Hamza **AL DARDOUR**	(32) 12.05.91	Al Hussein
COACH			
	Hussein **AMMOUTA** (Mar)	(54) 24.10.69	

KYRGYZSTAN

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Erzhan **TOKOTAEV**	(23) 17.07.00	Sanliurfaspor (Tur)
13	Sultan **CHOMOEV**	(20) 20.01.03	Dordoi Bishkek
16	Marsel **ISLAMKULOV**	(29) 18.04.94	Abdysh-Ata Kant
DEFENDERS			
2	Khristiyan **BRAUZMAN**	(20) 15.08.03	Abdysh-Ata Kant
3	Tamirlan **KOZUBAEV**	(29) 01.07.94	Eastern (Hkg)
5	Ayzar **AKMATOV**	(25) 24.08.98	Abdysh-Ata Kant
6	Amantur **SHAMURZAEV**	(23) 25.01.00	Abdysh-Ata Kant
11	Bekzhan **SAGYNBAEV**	(29) 11.09.94	Dordoi Bishkek
14	Aleksandr **MISHCHENKO**	(26) 30.07.97	Dordoi Bishkek
17	Suyuntbek **MAMYRALIEV**	(26) 07.01.98	Dordoi Bishkek
18	Kayrat **ZHYRGALBEK UULU**	(30) 13.06.93	Abdysh-Ata Kant
20	Bakhtiyar **DUISHOBEKOV**	(28) 03.06.95	Muras United
MIDFIELDERS			
4	Adil **KADYRZHANOV**	(23) 14.07.00	Dordoi Bishkek
8	Azim **AZAROV**	(27) 20.09.96	Abdysh-Ata Kant
10	Gulzhigit **ALYKULOV**	(23) 25.11.00	Neman Grodno (Blr)
12	Odilzhon **ABDURAKHMANOV**	(27) 18.03.96	Maktaaral (Kaz)
15	Kai **MERK**	(25) 28.08.98	Union Titus Petange (Lux)
19	Beknaz **ALMAZBEKOV**	(18) 23.06.05	Galatasaray (Tur)
21	Farkhat **MUSABEKOV**	(30) 03.01.94	Abdysh-Ata Kant
22	Alimardon **SHUKUROV**	(24) 28.09.99	Neman Grodno (Blr)
23	Nurdoolot **STALBEKOV**	(22) 13.09.01	Alay
24	Kimi **MERK**	(19) 06.07.04	Pakhtakor (Uzb)
26	Atay **DZHUMASHEV**	(25) 15.09.98	Abdysh-Ata Kant
FORWARDS			
7	**JOEL** Kojo	(25) 21.08.98	Dinamo Samarqand (Uzb)
9	Ernist **BATYRKANOV**	(25) 21.02.98	Abdysh-Ata Kant
25	Dastanbek **TOKTOSUNOV**	(21) 02.09.02	Neftchi Kochkor-Ata
COACH			
	Stefan **TARKOVIC** (Slv)	(50) 18.02.73	

LEBANON

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Mehdi **KHALIL**	(32) 19.09.91	Al Faisaly (Jor)
21	Mostafa **MATAR**	(28) 10.09.95	Al Ahed
23	Ali **SABEH**	(29) 24.06.94	Nejmeh
DEFENDERS			
3	Maher **SABRA**	(31) 14.01.92	Nejmeh
4	Nour **MANSOUR**	(34) 22.10.89	Al Ahed
5	Nassar **NASSAR**	(32) 01.01.92	Al Ansar
6	Hussein **ZEIN**	(28) 27.01.95	Al Ahed
12	Alexander Michel **MELKI**	(31) 14.11.92	Al Ansar
13	Khalil **KHAMIS**	(29) 12.01.95	Al Ahed
18	Kassem **EL ZEIN**	(33) 02.12.90	Nejmeh
26	Hassan **CHAITOU**	(32) 16.06.91	Safa
MIDFIELDERS			
2	Yahya **EL HINDI**	(25) 24.09.98	Al Ansar
10	Mohamad **HAIDAR**	(34) 08.11.89	Al Ahed
14	Mouhammed-Ali **DHAINI**	(29) 01.03.94	Al Ansar
15	Jihad **AYOUB**	(28) 30.03.95	PSS Sleman (Idn)
16	Walid **SHOUR**	(27) 10.06.96	Al Ahed
19	Daniel **KURI**	(24) 22.01.99	Atlante (Mex)
20	Ali **TNEICH**	(31) 16.07.92	Al Ansar
24	Gabriel **BITAR**	(25) 23.08.98	Vancouver FC (Can)
25	Hasan **SROUR**	(22) 18.12.01	Al Ahed
FORWARDS			
7	Hassan **MAATOUK**	(36) 10.08.87	Al Ansar
8	Soony **SAAD**	(31) 17.08.92	Penang (Mas)
9	Hilal **EL-HELWE**	(29) 24.11.94	Bourj
11	Omar **CHAABAN** Bugiel	(30) 03.01.94	AFC Wimbledon (Eng)
17	Ali **AL HAJ**	(22) 02.02.01	Al Ahed
22	Bassel **JRADI**	(30) 06.07.93	Bangkok United (Tha)
COACH			
	Miodrag **RADULOVIC** (Mne)	(56) 23.10.67	

2023 ASIAN CUP

MALAYSIA

GOALKEEPERS

1	**AZRI** Ghani	(24) 30.04.99	Kuala Lumpur City
16	**SYIHAN** Hazmi	(27) 22.02.96	Johor Darul Ta'zim
23	**SIKH** Izhan	(21) 22.03.02	Negeri Sembilan

DEFENDERS

2	Matthew **DAVIES**	(28) 07.02.95	Johor Darul Ta'zim
3	**SHAHRUL** Saad	(30) 08.07.93	Johor Darul Ta'zim
4	Daniel **TING**	(31) 01.12.92	Sabah
5	**SYAHMI** Safari	(25) 05.02.98	Johor Darul Ta'zim
6	**DOMINIC** Tan	(26) 12.03.97	Sabah
15	**JUNIOR** Eldstal	(32) 16.09.91	Dewa United (Idn)
21	Dion **COOLS**	(27) 04.06.96	Buriram United (Tha)
22	La'Vere **CORBIN-ONG**	(32) 22.04.91	Johor Darul Ta'zim
25	**KHUZAIMI** Piee	(30) 11.11.93	Selangor

MIDFIELDERS

8	Stuart **WILKIN**	(25) 12.03.98	Sabah
10	**ENDRICK**	(28) 07.03.95	Johor Darul Ta'zim
14	**SYAMER** Kutty Abba	(26) 01.10.97	Johor Darul Ta'zim
18	Brendan **GAN**	(35) 03.06.88	Selangor
20	**AFIQ** Fazail	(29) 29.09.94	Johor Darul Ta'zim
24	**NATXO INSA**	(37) 09.06.86	Johor Darul Ta'zim

FORWARDS

7	**FAISAL** Halim	(26) 07.01.98	Selangor
9	Darren **LOK**	(33) 14.12.90	Sabah
11	**SAFAWI** Rasid	(26) 05.03.97	Johor Darul Ta'zim
12	**ARIF** Aiman Hanapi	(21) 04.05.02	Johor Darul Ta'zim
13	Mohamadou **SUMAREH**	(29) 20.09.94	Johor Darul Ta'zim
17	**PAULO JOSUE**	(34) 13.03.89	Kuala Lumpur City
19	**AKHYAR** Rashid	(24) 01.05.99	Johor Darul Ta'zim
26	**ROMEL** Morales	(26) 23.08.97	Kuala Lumpur City

COACH

KIM Pan-gon (Kor)	(54) 01.05.69	

OMAN

GOALKEEPERS

1	Ibrahim **AL MUKHAINI**	(26) 20.06.97	Al Nahda
18	Faiyz **AL RUSHEIDI**	(35) 19.07.88	Manama (Bhr)
22	Ahmed **AL RAWAHI**	(29) 05.05.94	Al Seeb

DEFENDERS

2	Ghanim **AL HABASHI**	(25) 04.08.98	Al Nahda
5	Juma **AL HABSI**	(27) 28.01.96	Ibri
6	Ahmed **AL KHAMISI**	(32) 26.11.91	Al Seeb
14	Ahmed **AL KAABI**	(27) 15.09.96	Al Nahda
16	Khalid **AL BRAIKI**	(30) 03.07.93	Al Shabab
17	Ali **AL BUSAIDI**	(32) 21.03.91	Al Seeb
19	Mahmood **AL MUSHAIFRI**	(30) 14.01.93	Al Nasr
21	Abdulaziz **AL GHEILANI**	(28) 14.05.95	Al Nahda

MIDFIELDERS

3	Fahmi **DURBIN**	(30) 10.10.93	Al Nasr
4	Arshad **AL ALAWI**	(23) 12.04.00	Al Seeb
9	Omar **AL MALKI**	(30) 04.01.94	Al Nahda
10	Jameel **AL YAHMADI**	(27) 27.07.96	Al Kharaitiyat (Qat)
12	Abdullah **FAWAZ**	(27) 03.10.96	Al Nahda
13	Mataz **SALEH**	(27) 28.05.96	Dhofar
15	Musaab **AL MAMARI**	(23) 22.01.00	Al Nasr
20	Salaah **AL YAHYAEI**	(25) 17.08.98	Al Nahda
23	Harib **AL SAADI**	(33) 01.02.90	Al Nahda
24	Tameem **AL BALUSHI**	(24) 03.11.99	Al Seeb

FORWARDS

7	Issam **AL SABHI**	(26) 01.05.97	Al Nahda
8	Zahir **AL AGHBARI**	(24) 28.05.99	Al Seeb
11	Muhsen **AL GHASSANI**	(26) 27.03.97	Al Seeb
25	Abdallah **AL MASHRAFI**	(22) 27.11.01	Dhofar
26	Abdulrahman **AL MUSHAIFRI**	(26) 28.11.97	Al Seeb

COACH

Branko **IVANKOVIC** (Cro)	(69) 28.02.54	

PALESTINE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Amr **KADDURA**	(29) 01.07.94	Landskrona BoIS (Swe)
16	Naim **ABUAKER**	(28) 20.01.95	Shabab Al Dhahiriya
22	Rami **HAMADA**	(29) 24.03.94	Jabal Al Mukaber
26	Baraa **KHAROUB**	(25) 20.03.98	Markaz Balata

DEFENDERS

2	Mohammed **KHALIL**	(25) 05.04.98	Hilal Al Quds
4	Yaser **HAMED**	(26) 09.12.97	North East United (Ind)
5	Mohammed **SALEH**	(30) 18.07.93	Al Ittihad Alexandria (Egy)
7	Musab **BATTAT**	(30) 12.11.93	Shabab Al Dhahiriya
12	Camilo **SALDANA**	(24) 13.07.99	Union San Felipe (Chi)
15	Michel **TERMANINI**	(25) 08.05.98	Kazma (Kuw)
17	Mousa **FARAWI**	(25) 22.03.98	Hilal Al Quds
18	Ameed **MAHAJNEH**	(27) 11.10.96	Hapoel Umm Al Fahm (Isr)
24	Mahdi **ISSA**	(25) 03.11.98	Jabal Al Mukaber
25	Samer **JONDI**	(27) 27.09.96	Hilal Al Quds

MIDFIELDERS

3	Mohammed **RASHID**	(28) 29.01.95	Bali United (Idn)
6	Oday **KHAROUB**	(30) 05.02.93	Hilal Al Quds
9	Tamer **SEYAM**	(31) 25.11.92	PT Prachuap (Tha)
10	Mahmoud **ABU WARDA**	(28) 31.05.95	Markaz Balata
14	Samer **ZUBAIDA**	(22) 26.04.01	Hilal Al Quds
21	Islam **BATRAN**	(29) 01.10.94	Hilal Al Quds
23	Attaa **JABER**	(29) 03.10.94	Neftchi Baku (Aze)

FORWARDS

8	Alaaedin **HASAN**	(23) 31.01.00	Bnei Sakhnin (Isr)
11	Oday **DABBAGH**	(25) 03.12.98	Royal Charleroi (Bel)
13	Shehab **QUMBOR**	(26) 10.08.97	Jabal Al Mukaber
19	Mahmoud **WADI**	(29) 19.12.94	Al Mokawloon (Egy)
20	Zaid **QUNBAR**	(21) 04.09.02	Jabal Al Mukaber

COACH

Makram **DABOUB** (Tun)	(51) 23.12.72	

Goalkeeper of the Tournament...Qatar's Meshaal Barsham

Rising star...promising Saudi forward Abdullah Radif

History...Palestine made the knockouts for the first time

QATAR

GOALKEEPERS

1	Saad **AL SHEEB**	(33) 19.02.90	Al Sadd
21	Salah **ZAKARIA**	(24) 24.04.99	Al Duhail
22	Meshaal **BARSHAM**	(25) 14.02.98	Al Sadd

DEFENDERS

2	**PEDRO MIGUEL**	(33) 06.08.90	Al Sadd
3	Almahdi **ALI MUKHTAR**	(31) 02.03.92	Al Wakrah
4	Mohammed **WAAD**	(24) 18.09.99	Al Sadd
5	Tarek **SALMAN**	(26) 05.12.97	Al Sadd
12	**LUCAS MENDES**	(33) 03.07.90	Al Wakrah
14	**HOMAM** Ahmed	(24) 25.08.99	Al Gharafa
15	Bassam **AL RAWI**	(26) 16.12.97	Al Rayyan
16	Boualem **KHOUKHI**	(33) 09.07.90	Al Sadd
18	Sultan **AL BRAKE**	(27) 07.04.96	Al Duhail

MIDFIELDERS

6	Abdulaziz **HATEM**	(34) 01.01.90	Al Rayyan
8	Ali **ASAD**	(30) 19.01.93	Al Sadd
10	Hassan **AL HAYDOS**	(33) 11.12.90	Al Sadd
17	**ISMAIL** Mohammad	(33) 05.04.90	Al Duhail
20	Ahmed **FATHY**	(30) 25.01.93	Al Arabi
23	**MOUSTAFA** Meshaal	(22) 28.03.01	Al Sadd
24	Jassem **GABER**	(21) 20.02.02	Al Arabi
26	Khaled Mohammed **SALEH**	(23) 07.06.00	Al Duhail

FORWARDS

7	Ahmed **ALAAELDIN**	(30) 31.01.93	Al Gharafa
9	Yusuf **ABDURISAG**	(24) 06.08.99	Al Sadd
11	Akram **AFIF**	(27) 18.11.96	Al Sadd
13	**KHALID** Muneer Mazid	(25) 24.02.98	Al Wakrah
19	**ALMOEZ** Ali	(27) 19.08.96	Al Duhail
25	Ahmed **AL GANEHI**	(23) 22.09.00	Al Gharafa

COACH

Tintin **MARQUEZ LOPEZ** (Spa)	(62) 07.01.62	

SAUDI ARABIA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Mohammed **AL RUBAIE**	(26) 14.08.97	Al Ahli
21	Raghed **NAJJAR**	(27) 20.09.96	Al Nassr
22	Ahmed **AL KASSAR**	(32) 08.05.91	Al Fayha

DEFENDERS

2	Fawaz **AL SQOOR**	(27) 23.04.96	Al Shabab
3	Awn **AL SALULI**	(25) 02.09.98	Al Taawoun
4	Ali **LAJAMI**	(27) 24.04.96	Al Nassr
5	Ali **AL BULAYHI**	(34) 21.11.89	Al Hilal
12	Saud **ABDULHAMID**	(24) 18.07.99	Al Hilal
13	Hassan **KADISH**	(31) 27.09.92	Al Ittihad
17	Hassan **AL TAMBAKTI**	(24) 09.02.99	Al Hilal
19	Rayane **HAMIDOU**	(21) 13.04.02	Al Ahli
25	Mohammed **AL BURAYK**	(31) 15.09.92	Al Hilal

MIDFIELDERS

6	Eid **AL MUWALLAD**	(22) 14.12.01	Al Okhdood
7	Mukhtar **ALI**	(26) 30.10.97	Al Fateh
8	Abdulellah **AL MALKI**	(29) 11.10.94	Al Hilal
10	Salem **AL DAWSARI**	(32) 19.08.91	Al Hilal
15	Abdullah **AL KHAIBARI**	(27) 16.08.96	Al Nassr
16	Sami **AL NAJEI**	(26) 07.02.97	Al Nassr
23	Mohamed **KANNO**	(29) 22.09.94	Al Hilal
24	Nasser **AL DAWSARI**	(25) 19.12.98	Al Hilal
26	Faisal **AL GHAMDI**	(22) 13.08.01	Al Ittihad

FORWARDS

9	Firas **AL BURAIKAN**	(23) 14.05.00	Al Ahli
11	Saleh **AL SHEHRI**	(30) 01.11.93	Al Hilal
14	Talal **HAJI**	(16) 16.09.07	Al Ittihad
18	Abdulrahman **GHAREEB**	(26) 31.03.97	Al Nassr
20	Abdullah **RADIF**	(20) 20.01.03	Al Shabab

COACH

Roberto **MANCINI** (Ita)	(59) 27.11.64	

SOUTH KOREA

GOALKEEPERS

1	**KIM** Seung-gyu	(33) 30.09.90	Al Shabab (KSA)
12	**SONG** Bum-keun	(26) 15.10.97	Shonan Bellmare (Jpn)
21	**JO** Hyeon-woo	(32) 25.09.91	Ulsan HD

DEFENDERS

2	**LEE** Ki-je	(32) 09.07.91	Suwon Samsung Bluewings
3	**KIM** Jin-su	(31) 13.06.92	Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors
4	**KIM** Min-jae	(27) 15.11.96	Bayern Munich (Ger)
15	**JUNG** Seung-hyun	(29) 03.04.94	Ulsan HD
19	**KIM** Young-gwon	(33) 27.02.90	Ulsan HD
22	**SEOL** Young-woo	(25) 05.12.98	Ulsan HD
23	**KIM** Tae-hwan	(34) 24.07.89	Ulsan HD
24	**KIM** Ju-sung	(23) 12.12.00	FC Seoul
25	**KIM** Ji-soo	(19) 24.12.04	Brentford (Eng)

MIDFIELDERS

5	**PARK** Yong-woo	(30) 10.09.93	Al Ain (UAE)
6	**HWANG** In-beom	(27) 20.09.96	Red Star Belgrade (Srb)
8	**HONG** Hyun-seok	(24) 16.06.99	Gent (Bel)
10	**LEE** Jae-sung	(31) 10.08.92	Mainz (Ger)
13	**LEE** Soon-min	(29) 22.05.94	Gwangju FC
14	**MOON** Seon-min	(31) 09.06.92	Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors
16	**PARK** Jin-seop	(28) 23.10.95	Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors
17	**JEONG** Woo-yeong	(24) 20.09.99	Stuttgart (Ger)
18	**LEE** Kang-in	(22) 19.02.01	Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
26	**YANG** Hyun-jun	(21) 25.05.02	Celtic (Sco)

FORWARDS

7	**SON** Heung-min	(31) 08.07.92	Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
9	**CHO** Gue-sung	(25) 25.01.98	Midtjylland (Den)
11	**HWANG** Hee-chan	(27) 26.01.96	Wolves (Eng)
20	**OH** Hyeon-gyu	(22) 12.04.01	Celtic (Sco)

COACH

Jurgen **KLINSMANN** (Ger)	(59) 30.07.64	

SYRIA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Ibrahim **ALMA**	(32) 18.10.91	Tishreen
22	Ahmad **MADANIEH**	(34) 01.01.90	Jableh
23	Taha **MOUSA**	(36) 24.05.87	Al Fotuwa
26	Maksim **SARRAF**	(18) 15.03.05	CSKA Moscow (Rus)

DEFENDERS

2	Aiham **OUSOU**	(24) 09.01.00	BK Hacken (Swe)
3	Moayad **AL AJAAN**	(30) 16.02.93	Al Jaish
5	Omar **AL MIDANI**	(29) 26.01.94	Al Nasr (Kuw)
6	Amro **JENIAT**	(30) 15.01.93	Al Wahda
13	Thaer **KROUMA**	(33) 02.02.90	Al Fotuwa
15	Khaled **KOURDOGHLI**	(26) 31.01.97	Al Wehdat (Jor)
19	Muayad **AL KHOULI**	(30) 16.10.93	Al Jaish
24	Abdul Rahman **OUES**	(25) 14.06.98	Athens Kallithea (Gre)

MIDFIELDERS

4	Ezequiel **HAM**	(30) 10.01.94	Independiente Rivadavia (Arg)
8	Kamel **HMEISHEH**	(25) 23.07.98	Al Ahli (Bhr)
10	Mohammad **AL MARMOUR**	(29) 04.01.95	Al Ahed (Lbn)
12	Ammar **RAMADAN**	(23) 05.01.01	DAC (Svk)
14	Mouhamad **ANEZ**	(28) 14.05.95	Al Riffa (Bhr)
16	Elmar **ABRAHAM**	(24) 01.03.99	Skovde AIK (Swe)
17	Fahd **YOUSSEF**	(36) 15.05.87	Al Shorta (Irq)
18	Jalil **ELIAS**	(27) 25.04.96	Johor Darul Ta'zim (Mas)
21	Ibrahim **HESAR**	(30) 15.11.93	Belgrano (Arg)

FORWARDS

7	Omar **KHRBIN**	(29) 15.01.94	Al Wahda (UAE)
9	Alaa **DALI**	(27) 03.01.97	Naft Missan (Irq)
11	Pablo **SABBAG**	(26) 11.06.97	Alianza Lima (Per)
20	Antonio **YAKOUB**	(21) 12.06.02	Gefle IF (Swe)
25	Mahmoud **AL ASWAD**	(20) 14.09.03	Al Karamah

COACH

Hector **CUPER** (Arg)	(68) 16.11.55	

TAJIKSTAN

GOALKEEPERS

1	Rustam **YATIMOV**	(25) 13.07.98	Istiklol
16	Daler **BAROTOV**	(24) 29.01.99	Istaravshan
23	Muhriddin **HASANOV**	(21) 23.09.02	Istiklol

DEFENDERS

2	Zoir **DZHURABOEV**	(25) 16.09.98	Neftchi Fergana (Uzb)
3	Tabrez **ISLOMOV**	(25) 06.06.98	Istiklol
4	Kholmurod **NAZAROV**	(31) 04.02.92	Ravshan Kulob
5	Manuchehr **SAFAROV**	(22) 31.05.01	Neftchi Fergana (Uzb)
6	Vahdat **HANONOV**	(23) 25.07.00	Persepolis (Irn)
12	Sodiqjon **QURBONOV**	(20) 19.01.03	Istiklol
19	Akhtam **NAZAROV**	(31) 29.09.92	Istiklol
24	Daler **IMOMNAZAROV**	(28) 31.05.95	Eskhata Khujand

MIDFIELDERS

7	Parvizdzhon **UMARBOEV**	(29) 01.11.94	CSKA 1948 (Bul)
8	Komron **TURSUNOV**	(27) 24.04.96	Gokulam Kerala (Ind)
10	Alisher **DZHALILOV**	(30) 29.08.93	Istiklol
11	Muhammadjon **RAHIMOV**	(25) 15.10.98	Bukhara (Uzb)
13	Amadoni **KAMOLOV**	(20) 16.01.03	Istiklol
14	Alisher **SHUKUROV**	(21) 30.03.02	Kuktosh
17	Ehson **PANSHANBE**	(24) 12.05.99	Istiklol
18	Ruslan **KHAILOEV**	(20) 29.10.03	Tyumen (Rus)
20	Alijoni **BURIZOD**	(19) 06.08.04	Istiklol
21	Vaysiddin **SAFAROV**	(27) 15.04.96	CSKA Pamir Dushanbe

FORWARDS

9	Rustam **SOIROV**	(21) 12.09.02	Lokomotiv Tashkent (Uzb)
15	Shervoni **MABATSHOEV**	(23) 04.12.00	Istiklol
22	Shahrom **SAMIEV**	(22) 08.02.01	Milsami Orhei (Mda)
25	Nuriddin **KHAMROKULOV**	(24) 25.10.99	Regar-TadAZ Tursunzoda
26	Muhammadali **AZIZBOEV**	(21) 04.01.03	Hosilot Farkhor

COACH

Petar **SEGRT** (Cro)	(57) 08.05.66	

THAILAND

GOALKEEPERS

1	**SIWARAK** Tedsungnoen	(39) 20.04.84	Buriram United
20	**SARANON** Anuin	(29) 24.03.94	Chiangrai United
23	**PATIWAT** Khammai	(29) 24.12.94	Bangkok United

DEFENDERS

2	**SANTIPHARP** Channgom	(27) 23.09.96	BG Pathum United
3	**THEERATHON** Bunmathan	(33) 06.02.90	Buriram United
4	Elias **DOLAH**	(30) 24.04.93	Bali United (Idn)
12	Nicholas **MICKELSON**	(24) 24.07.99	OB (Den)
16	**JAKKAPAN** Praisuwan	(29) 16.08.94	BG Pathum United
17	**PANSA** Hemviboon	(33) 08.07.90	Buriram United
21	**SUPHANAN** Bureerat	(30) 10.10.93	Port
26	**SUPHAN** Thongsong	(29) 26.08.94	Bangkok United

MIDFIELDERS

5	Kritsada **KAMAN**	(24) 18.03.99	BG Pathum United
6	**SARACH** Yooyen	(31) 30.05.92	BG Pathum United
7	**SUPACHOK** Sarachat	(25) 22.05.98	Hokkaido Consadole Sapporo (Jpn)
8	**PICHA** Autra	(28) 07.01.96	Muangthong United
11	**BORDIN** Phala	(29) 20.12.94	Port
13	**JAROENSAK** Wonggorn	(26) 18.05.97	Muangthong United
14	**RUNGRAT** Poomchantuek	(31) 17.05.92	Bangkok United
18	**WEERATHEP** Pomphan	(27) 19.09.96	Muangthong United
19	**PATHOMPON** Charoenrattanapirom	(29) 21.04.94	Port
22	**CHANNARONG** Promsrikaew	(22) 17.04.01	Chonburi
24	**WORACHIT** Kanitsribampen	(26) 24.08.97	Port
25	**PEERADOL** Chamratsamee	(31) 15.09.92	Buriram United

FORWARDS

9	**SUPACHAI** Chaided	(25) 01.12.98	Buriram United
10	**SUPHANAT** Mueanta	(21) 02.08.02	OH Leuven (Bel)
15	**TEERASAK** Poeiphimai	(21) 21.09.02	Port

COACH

Masatada **ISHII** (Jpn)	(56) 01.02.67	

Syrian surprise...the Qasioun Eagles did their country proud

Upset...debutants Tajikistan reached the quarter-finals

Disappointing...UAE crashed out to Tajikistan on penalties

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

GOALKEEPERS

1	Ali **KHASEIF**	(36) 09.06.87	Al Jazira
17	Khalid **EISA**	(34) 15.09.89	Al Ain
22	Hassan **HAMZA**	(29) 10.11.94	Shabab Al Ahli

DEFENDERS

2	Abdulla **IDREES**	(24) 16.08.99	Al Jazira
3	Zayed **SULTAN**	(22) 11.04.01	Al Jazira
4	Khalid **AL HASHEMI**	(26) 18.03.97	Al Ain
12	Khalifa **AL HAMMADI**	(25) 07.11.98	Al Jazira
13	Mohammed **AL ATTAS**	(26) 05.08.97	Al Jazira
19	Khaled Ibrahim **AL DHANHANI**	(26) 17.01.97	Sharjah
24	Ahmed **JAMIL**	(24) 16.01.99	Shabab Al Ahli
25	Abdulrahman **SALEH**	(21) 13.10.02	Al Wasl
26	Bader **NASSER**	(22) 16.09.01	Shabab Al Ahli

MIDFIELDERS

5	Ali **SALMEEN**	(28) 02.04.95	Al Wasl
6	Majid **RASHID**	(23) 16.05.00	Sharjah
8	Tahnoon **AL ZAABI**	(24) 10.04.99	Al Wahda
14	Abdulla Hamad **AL MENHALI**	(22) 18.09.01	Al Wahda
15	Yahia **NADER**	(25) 11.09.98	Al Ain
16	Mohammed **ABBAS**	(21) 30.09.02	Al Ain
18	Abdullah **RAMADAN**	(25) 07.03.98	Al Jazira

FORWARDS

7	Ali **MABKHOUT**	(33) 05.10.90	Al Jazira
9	Ali **SALEH**	(23) 22.01.00	Al Wasl
10	**FABIO LIMA**	(30) 30.06.93	Al Wasl
11	**CAIO CANEDO**	(33) 09.08.90	Al Wasl
20	Yahya **AL GHASSANI**	(25) 18.04.98	Shabab Al Ahli
21	Harib **ABDALLA**	(21) 26.11.02	Shabab Al Ahli
23	Sultan **ADIL**	(19) 04.05.04	Kalba

COACH

Paulo **BENTO** (Por)	(54) 20.06.69	

UZBEKISTAN

GOALKEEPERS

1	Utkir **YUSUPOV**	(33) 04.01.91	Navbahor
12	Abduvakhid **NEMATOV**	(22) 20.03.01	Nasaf Qarshi
16	Botirali **ERGASHEV**	(28) 23.06.95	AGMK

DEFENDERS

2	Muhammadkodir **HAMRALIEV**	(22) 06.07.01	Pakhtakor
3	Khojiakbar **ALIJONOV**	(26) 19.04.97	Pakhtakor
4	Farrukh **SAYFIEV**	(32) 17.01.91	Pakhtakor
5	Rustam **ASHURMATOV**	(27) 07.07.96	Rubin Kazan (Rus)
13	Sherzod **NASRULLAEV**	(25) 23.07.98	Nasaf Qarshi
15	Umar **ESHMURODOV**	(31) 30.11.92	Nasaf Qarshi
18	Abdulla **ABDULLAEV**	(26) 01.09.97	Khor Fakkan (UAE)
25	Abdukodir **KHUSANOV**	(19) 29.02.04	Lens (Fra)
26	Zafarmurod **ABDURIKHMATOV**	(20) 28.04.03	Nasaf Qarshi

MIDFIELDERS

6	Diyor **KHOLMATOV**	(21) 22.07.02	Pakhtakor
7	Otabek **SHUKUROV**	(27) 22.06.96	Fatih Karagumruk (Tur)
8	Jamshid **ISKANDEROV**	(30) 16.10.93	Navbahor
9	Odiljon **HAMROBEKOV**	(27) 13.02.96	Pakhtakor
10	Jaloliddin **MASHARIPOV**	(30) 01.09.93	Panserraikos (Gre)
11	Oston **URUNOV**	(23) 19.12.00	Navbahor
14	Jamshid **BOLTABOEV**	(27) 03.10.96	Navbahor
19	Azizbek **TURGUNBOEV**	(29) 01.10.94	Pakhtakor
20	Hojimat **ERKINOV**	(22) 29.05.01	Pakhtakor
22	Abbosbek **FAYZULLAEV**	(20) 03.10.03	CSKA Moscow (Rus)
23	Shokhboz **UMAROV**	(24) 09.03.99	Ordabasy (Kaz)

FORWARDS

17	Bobir **ABDIXOLIKOV**	(26) 23.04.97	Ordabasy (Kaz)
21	Igor **SERGEEV**	(30) 30.04.93	BG Pathum United (Tha)
24	Azizbek **AMONOV**	(26) 30.10.97	Nasaf Qarshi

COACH

Srecko **KATANEC** (Slv)	(60) 16.07.63	

VIETNAM

GOALKEEPERS

1	Nguyen **FILIP**	(31) 14.09.92	Hanoi Police
21	Nguyen **DINH TRIEU**	(32) 04.11.91	Haiphong
23	Nguyen **VAN VIET**	(21) 12.07.02	Song Lam Nghe An

DEFENDERS

2	Do **DUY MANH**	(27) 29.09.96	Hanoi FC
3	Vo **MINH TRONG**	(22) 24.10.01	Becamex Binh Duong
4	Ho **TAN TAI**	(26) 06.11.97	Hanoi Police
5	Giap **TUAN DUONG**	(21) 07.09.02	Hanoi Police
6	Nguyen **THANH BINH**	(23) 02.11.00	The Cong-Viettel
7	Pham **XUAN MANH**	(27) 27.03.96	Hanoi FC
12	Phan **TUAN TAI**	(23) 07.01.01	The Cong-Viettel
17	Vu **VAN THANH**	(27) 14.04.96	Hanoi Police
20	Bui Hoang **VIET ANH**	(25) 01.01.99	Hanoi Police
26	Le **NGOC BAO**	(25) 27.03.98	Quy Nhon Binh Dinh

MIDFIELDERS

8	Do **HUNG DUNG**	(30) 08.09.93	Hanoi FC
11	Nguyen **TUAN ANH**	(28) 16.05.95	LPBank HAGL
13	Truong **TIEN ANH**	(24) 25.04.99	The Cong-Viettel
16	Nguyen **THAI SON**	(20) 13.07.03	Dong A Thanh Hoa
18	Nguyen **HAI LONG**	(23) 27.08.00	Hanoi FC
19	Nguyen **QUANG HAI**	(26) 12.04.97	Hanoi Police
25	Le Pham **THANH LONG**	(27) 05.06.96	Hanoi Police

FORWARDS

9	Nguyen **VAN TOAN**	(27) 12.04.96	Thep Xanh Nam Dinh
10	Pham **TUAN HAI**	(25) 19.05.98	Hanoi FC
14	Nguyen **VAN TRUONG**	(20) 09.10.03	Hanoi FC
15	Nguyen **DINH BAC**	(19) 19.08.04	Quang Nam
22	Khuat **VAN KHANG**	(20) 11.05.03	The Cong-Viettel
24	Nguyen **VAN TUNG**	(22) 02.06.01	Hanoi FC

COACH

Philippe **TROUSSIER** (Fra)	(68) 21.03.55	

(ages of 12.01.24)

LIGUE 1 2023-24

BREST

GOALKEEPERS

16	Yan **MARILLAT**	(29) 12.08.94
30	Gregoire **COUDERT**	(24) 03.04.99
40	Marco **BIZOT** (Ned)	(33) 10.03.91

DEFENDERS

2	Bradley **LOCKO**	(21) 06.05.02
3	Lilian **BRASSIER**	(24) 02.11.99
5	Brendan **CHARDONNET**	(29) 22.12.94
12	Luc **ZOGBE** (Civ)	(18) 24.03.05
18	Antonin **CARTILLIER**	(19) 23.06.04
19	Jordan **AMAVI**	(30) 09.03.94
25	Julien **LE CARDINAL**	(26) 03.08.97
27	Kenny **LALA**	(32) 03.10.91

MIDFIELDERS

8	Hugo **MAGNETTI**	(25) 30.05.98
11	Axel **CAMBLAN**	(20) 30.08.03
14	Adrien **LEBEAU**	(24) 08.07.99
20	Pierre **LEES-MELOU**	(30) 25.05.93
23	Kamory **DOUMBIA** (Mli)	(21) 18.02.03
26	Mathias **PEREIRA LAGE** (Por)	(27) 30.11.96
28	Jonas **MARTIN**	(33) 09.04.90
45	Mahdi **CAMARA**	(25) 30.06.98

FORWARDS

7	Martin **SATRIANO** (Uru)	(23) 20.02.01
9	Steve **MOUNIE** (Ben)	(29) 29.09.94
10	Romain **DEL CASTILLO**	(27) 29.03.96
21	Bilal **BRAHIMI** (Alg)	(24) 14.03.00
22	Jeremy **LE DOUARON**	(25) 21.04.98
33	Djibril **KONTE**	(21) 04.11.02

COACH

Eric **ROY**	(56) 26.09.67

CLERMONT

GOALKEEPERS

1	Massamba **N'DIAYE** (Sen)	(22) 08.10.01
16	Theo **BORNE**	(21) 15.07.02
99	Mory **DIAW** (Sen)	(30) 22.06.93

DEFENDERS

2	Mehdi **ZEFFANE** (Alg)	(31) 19.05.92
3	Neto **BORGES** (Bra)	(27) 13.09.96
4	Chrislain **MATSIMA**	(21) 15.05.02
5	Maximiliano **CAUFRIEZ** (Bel)	(27) 16.02.97
15	Cheick Oumar **KONATE** (Mli)	(19) 02.04.04
17	Andy **PELMARD**	(24) 12.03.00
21	Florent **OGIER**	(34) 21.03.89
22	Yoel **ARMOUGOM**	(25) 05.06.98
27	Mohamed **SYLLA**	(20) 30.01.04
97	Jeremy **JACQUET**	(18) 13.07.05

MIDFIELDERS

6	Habib **KEITA** (Mli)	(22) 05.02.02
7	Yohann **MAGNIN**	(26) 21.06.97
8	Bilal **BOUTOBBA**	(25) 29.08.98
10	Muhammed **CHAM** (Aut)	(23) 26.09.00
12	Maxime **GONALONS**	(35) 10.03.89
24	Stan **BERKANI** (Alg)	(20) 13.08.03
25	Johan **GASTIEN**	(36) 25.01.88

FORWARDS

9	Komnen **ANDRIC** (Srb)	(28) 01.07.95
11	Jim **ALLEVINAH** (Gab)	(29) 27.02.95
13	Abdellah **BAALLAL** (Mar)	(19) 07.11.04
18	Elbasan **RASHANI** (Kos)	(30) 09.05.93
19	Mohamed-Amine **BOUCHENNA**	(17) 15.06.06
23	Shamar **NICHOLSON** (Jam)	(26) 16.03.97
26	Alan **VIRGINIUS**	(21) 03.01.03
91	Jeremie **BELA** (Ang)	(30) 08.04.93
95	Grejohn **KYEI**	(28) 12.08.95

COACH

Pascal **GASTIEN**	(60) 02.12.63

LE HAVRE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Mathieu **GORGELIN**	(33) 05.08.90
30	Arthur **DESMAS**	(29) 07.04.94

DEFENDERS

4	Gautier **LLORIS**	(28) 18.07.95
6	Etienne **KINKOUE**	(22) 14.01.02
7	Loic **NEGO** (Hun)	(33) 15.01.91
17	Oualid **EL HAJJAM** (Mar)	(33) 19.02.91
22	Yoann **SALMIER** (Guf)	(31) 21.11.92
27	Christopher **OPERI** (Civ)	(26) 29.04.97
35	Yoni **GOMIS**	(18) 23.09.05
66	Aliou **THIARE** (Sen)	(20) 20.12.03
93	Arouna **SANGANTE** (Sen)	(21) 12.04.02

MIDFIELDERS

5	Oussama **TARGHALLINE** (Mar)	(21) 20.05.02
8	Yassine **KECHTA** (Mar)	(22) 25.02.02
14	Daler **KUZYAEV** (Rus)	(31) 15.01.93
19	Rassoul **N'DIAYE** (Sen)	(22) 11.12.01
25	Alois **CONFAIS**	(27) 09.07.96
26	Simon **EBONOG** (Cmr)	(19) 16.08.04
37	Mokrane **BENTOUMI**	(18) 16.06.05
94	Abdoulaye **TOURE** (Gui)	(30) 03.03.94

FORWARDS

9	Mohamed **BAYO** (Gui)	(25) 04.06.98
11	Emmanuel **SABBI** (USA)	(26) 24.12.97
13	Steve **NGOURA**	(19) 22.02.05
20	Andy **LOGBO**	(19) 06.05.04
21	Antoine **JOUJOU**	(21) 12.03.03
23	Josue **CASIMIR** (Glp)	(22) 24.09.01
28	Andre **AYEW** (Gha)	(34) 17.12.89
29	Samuel **GRANDSIR**	(27) 14.08.96

COACH

Luka **ELSNER** (Svn)	(41) 02.08.82

LENS

GOALKEEPERS

16	Jean-Louis **LECA**	(38) 21.09.85
30	Brice **SAMBA**	(29) 25.04.94
40	Yannick **PANDOR** (Com)	(22) 01.05.01

DEFENDERS

2	Ruben **AGUILAR**	(30) 26.04.93
3	Deiver **MACHADO** (Col)	(30) 02.09.93
4	Kevin **DANSO** (Aut)	(25) 19.09.98
13	Jhoanner **CHAVEZ** (Ecu)	(21) 25.04.02
14	Facundo **MEDINA** (Arg)	(24) 28.05.99
19	Jimmy **CABOT**	(29) 18.04.94
21	Massadio **HAIDARA** (Mli)	(31) 02.12.92
24	Jonathan **GRADIT**	(31) 24.11.92
25	Abdukodir **KHUSANOV** (Uzb)	(20) 29.02.04
38	Keny **M'BALA**	(19) 02.06.04

MIDFIELDERS

6	Salis **ABDUL SAMED** (Gha)	(23) 26.03.00
10	David **COSTA** (Por)	(23) 05.01.01
11	Angelo **FULGINI**	(27) 20.08.96
18	Andy **DIOUF**	(20) 17.05.03
23	Neil **EL AYNAOUI** (Mar)	(22) 02.07.01
26	Nampalys **MENDY** (Sen)	(31) 23.06.92
28	Adrien **THOMASSON**	(30) 10.12.93
29	Przemyslaw **FRANKOWSKI** (Pol)	(28) 12.04.95
31	Tom **POUILLY**	(20) 18.06.03
32	Ayanda **SISHUBA** (Bel)	(19) 02.02.05
33	Fode **SYLLA**	(17) 16.04.06
34	Adam **ABEDDOU**	(27) 17.08.96

FORWARDS

7	Florian **SOTOCA**	(33) 25.10.90
9	Elye **WAHI**	(21) 02.01.03
22	Wesley **SAID**	(28) 19.04.95
27	Morgan **GUILAVOGUI** (Gui)	(26) 10.03.98
36	Ibrahima **BALDE**	(21) 17.01.03
39	Anthony **BERMONT**	(19) 10.02.05

COACH

Franck **HAISE**	(52) 15.04.71

LILLE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Vito **MANNONE** (Ita)	(36) 02.03.88
16	Adam **JAKUBECH** (Svk)	(27) 02.01.97
30	Lucas **CHEVALIER**	(22) 06.11.01

DEFENDERS

4	Alexsandro **RIBEIRO** (Bra)	(24) 09.08.99
5	Gabriel **GUDMUNDSSON** (Swe)	(24) 29.04.99
14	Samuel **UMTITI**	(30) 14.11.93
15	Leny **YORO**	(18) 13.11.05
18	Bafode **DIAKITE**	(23) 06.01.01
22	Tiago **SANTOS** (Por)	(21) 23.07.02
28	Rafael **FERNANDES** (Por)	(21) 28.06.02
31	**ISMAILY** (Bra)	(34) 11.01.90
36	Ousmane **TOURE**	(19) 18.02.05

MIDFIELDERS

6	Nabil **BENTALEB** (Alg)	(29) 24.11.94
7	Hakon **HARALDSSON** (Isl)	(20) 10.04.03
8	Angel **GOMES** (Eng)	(23) 31.08.00
10	Remy **CABELLA**	(34) 08.03.90
12	Yusuf **YAZICI** (Tur)	(27) 29.01.97
20	Ignacio **MIRAMON** (Arg)	(20) 12.06.03
21	Benjamin **ANDRE**	(33) 03.08.90
32	Ayyoub **BOUADDI**	(16) 02.10.07
35	Adame **FAIZ**	(18) 10.06.05
39	Lilian **BARET**	(17) 25.05.06

FORWARDS

9	Jonathan **DAVID** (Can)	(24) 14.01.00
11	Adam **OUNAS** (Alg)	(27) 11.11.96
17	Ivan **CAVALEIRO** (Por)	(30) 18.10.93
19	Tiago **MORAIS** (Por)	(20) 03.09.03
23	Edon **ZHEGROVA** (Kos)	(24) 31.03.99
24	Andrej **ILIC** (Srb)	(23) 03.04.00
34	Aaron **MALOUDA**	(18) 30.11.05
38	Ichem **FERRAH**	(18) 23.09.05

COACH

Paulo **FONSECA** (Por)	(51) 05.03.73

LORIENT

GOALKEEPERS

1	Alfred **GOMIS** (Sen)	(30) 05.09.93
38	Yvon **MVOGO** (Sui)	(29) 06.06.94
94	Dominique **YOUFEIGANE** (Cta)	(24) 07.02.00

DEFENDERS

2	Igor **SILVA** (Bra)	(27) 21.08.96
3	Montassar **TALBI** (Tun)	(25) 26.05.98
4	Loris **MOUYOKOLO**	(22) 22.05.01
5	Benjamin **MENDY**	(29) 17.07.94
12	Darlin **YONGWA** (Cmr)	(23) 22.09.00
13	Formose **MENDY** (Sen)	(23) 02.01.01
15	Julien **LAPORTE**	(30) 04.11.93
24	Gedeon **KALULU** (Cod)	(26) 29.08.97
32	Nathaniel **ADJEI** (Gha)	(21) 21.08.02
33	Aurelien **PELON**	(19) 06.05.04
37	Theo **LE BRIS**	(21) 01.10.02
95	Isaak **TOURE**	(20) 28.03.03

MIDFIELDERS

6	Imran **LOUZA** (Mar)	(24) 01.05.99
7	Panos **KATSERIS** (Gre)	(22) 05.07.01
8	Bonke **INNOCENT** (Nga)	(28) 20.01.96
14	Tiemoue **BAKAYOKO**	(29) 17.08.94
17	Jean-Victor **MAKENGO**	(25) 12.06.98
19	Laurent **ABERGEL**	(31) 01.02.93
21	Julien **PONCEAU**	(23) 28.11.00
22	Eli **KROUPI**	(17) 23.06.06
34	Gino **CAOKI**	(19) 17.07.04
35	Arthur **AVOM EBONG** (Cmr)	(19) 15.12.04
39	Carmel **MABANZA** (Cod)	(20) 13.08.03
44	Ayman **KARI**	(19) 19.11.04
97	Quentin **BOISGARD**	(26) 17.03.97

FORWARDS

9	Mohamed **BAMBA** (Civ)	(22) 10.12.01
10	Badredine **BOUANANI** (Alg)	(19) 08.12.04
11	Bamba **DIENG** (Sen)	(23) 23.03.00
27	Aiyegun **TOSIN** (Ben)	(25) 26.06.98
36	Royce **OPENDA** (Gab)	(21) 21.04.02

COACH

Regis **LE BRIS**	(48) 06.12.75

LYON

GOALKEEPERS

1	Anthony **LOPES** (Por)	(33) 01.10.90
23	Lucas **PERRI** (Bra)	(26) 10.12.97
30	Justin **BENGUI**	(18) 09.07.05

DEFENDERS

2	Sinaly **DIOMANDE** (Civ)	(22) 09.04.01
3	Nicolas **TAGLIAFICO** (Arg)	(31) 31.08.92
5	Dejan **LOVREN** (Cro)	(34) 05.07.89
12	Jake **O'BRIEN** (Irl)	(22) 15.05.01
14	**ADRYELSON** (Bra)	(25) 23.03.98
20	Sael **KUMBEDI**	(18) 26.03.05
21	**HENRIQUE** (Bra)	(29) 25.04.94
22	**CLINTON** (Ang)	(31) 07.11.92
55	Duje **CALETA-CAR** (Cro)	(27) 17.09.96

MIDFIELDERS

4	Paul **AKOUOKOU** (Civ)	(26) 20.12.97
6	Maxence **CAQUERET**	(24) 15.02.00
8	Corentin **TOLISSO**	(29) 03.08.94
24	Johann **LEPENANT**	(21) 22.10.02
25	Orel **MANGALA** (Bel)	(25) 18.03.98
31	Nemanja **MATIC** (Srb)	(35) 01.08.88
33	Chaim **EL DJEBALI** (Tun)	(20) 07.02.04
84	Mohamed **EL AROUCH**	(19) 06.04.04
98	Ainsley **MAITLAND-NILES** (Eng)	(26) 29.08.97

FORWARDS

7	Mama **BALDE** (Gnb)	(28) 06.11.95
9	Gift **ORBAN** (Nga)	(21) 17.07.02
10	Alexandre **LACAZETTE**	(32) 28.05.91
11	Malick **FOFANA** (Bel)	(18) 31.03.05
17	Said **BENRAHMA** (Alg)	(28) 10.08.95
18	Rayan **CHERKI**	(20) 17.08.03
34	Mahamadou **DIAWARA**	(19) 17.02.05
37	Ernest **NUAMAH** (Gha)	(20) 01.11.03

COACH

Pierre **SAGE**	(44) 05.05.79

Captain fantastic...Lyon skipper and star striker Alexandre Lacazette

MARSEILLE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Simon **NGAPANDOUETNBU** (Cmr)	(20) 12.04.03
16	Pau **LOPEZ** (Spa)	(29) 13.12.94
36	Ruben **BLANCO** (Spa)	(28) 25.07.95

DEFENDERS

3	Quentin **MERLIN**	(21) 16.05.02
4	Samuel **GIGOT**	(30) 12.10.93
5	Leonardo **BALERDI** (Arg)	(25) 26.01.99
6	Ulisses **GARCIA** (Sui)	(28) 11.01.96
7	Jonathan **CLAUSS**	(31) 25.09.92
18	Bamo **MEITE** (Civ)	(22) 03.12.01
31	Leo **JOUSSELIN**	(22) 02.01.02
32	Roggerio **NYAKOSSI** (Sui)	(20) 13.01.04
33	Stephane **SPARAGNA**	(29) 17.02.95
42	Yakine **SAID M'MADI** (Com)	(20) 11.03.04
62	Michael **MURILLO** (Pan)	(28) 11.02.96
99	Chancel **MBEMBA** (Cod)	(29) 08.08.94

MIDFIELDERS

8	Azzedine **OUNAHI** (Mar)	(23) 19.04.00
11	Amine **HARIT** (Mar)	(26) 18.06.97
17	Jean **ONANA** (Cmr)	(24) 08.01.00
19	Geoffrey **KONDOGBIA** (Cta)	(31) 15.02.93
21	Valentin **RONGIER**	(29) 07.12.94
22	Pape **GUEYE** (Sen)	(25) 24.01.99
27	Jordan **VERETOUT**	(31) 01.03.93
34	Bilal **NADIR** (Mar)	(20) 28.11.03
37	Emran **SOGLO** (Eng)	(18) 11.07.05
39	Alexandre **TUNKADI**	(18) 20.10.05
45	Paolo **SCIORTINO**	(20) 05.11.03
66	Noam **MAYOKA-TIKA** (Bel)	(20) 02.11.03

FORWARDS

10	Pierre-Emerick **AUBAMEYANG** (Gab)	(34) 18.06.89
14	Faris **MOUMBAGNA** (Cmr)	(23) 01.07.00
20	Joaquin **CORREA** (Arg)	(29) 13.08.94
23	Ismaila **SARR** (Sen)	(26) 25.02.98
29	Iliman **NDIAYE** (Sen)	(24) 06.03.00
41	Sofiane **SIDI ALI**	(28) 14.07.95
44	Luis **HENRIQUE** (Bra)	(22) 14.12.01
47	Iuri **MOREIRA** (Por)	(19) 24.03.04

COACH

Jean-Louis **GASSET**	(70) 09.12.53

METZ

GOALKEEPERS

1	Guillaume **DIETSCH**	(22) 17.04.01
16	Alexandre **OUKIDJA** (Alg)	(35) 19.07.88
30	Marc-Aurele **CAILLARD**	(29) 12.05.94

DEFENDERS

2	Maxime **COLIN**	(32) 15.11.91
3	Matthieu **UDOL**	(27) 20.03.96
5	Fali **CANDE** (Gnb)	(26) 24.01.98
8	Ismael **TRAORE** (Civ)	(37) 18.08.86
15	Aboubacar **LO** (Sen)	(24) 02.01.00
22	Kevin **VAN DEN KERKHOF** (Alg)	(28) 14.03.96
29	Christophe **HERELLE** (Mtq)	(31) 22.08.92
38	Sadibou **SANE** (Sen)	(19) 10.06.04
39	Koffi **KOUAO** (Civ)	(25) 20.05.98

MIDFIELDERS

6	Kevin **N'DORAM**	(28) 22.01.96
18	Lamine **CAMARA** (Sen)	(20) 01.01.04
25	Arthur **ATTA**	(21) 14.01.03
27	Danley **JEAN-JACQUES** (Hai)	(23) 20.05.00
34	Joseph **N'DUQUIDI**	(19) 31.10.04

FORWARDS

7	Papa **DIALLO** (Sen)	(19) 25.06.04
10	Georges **MIKAUTADZE** (Geo)	(23) 31.10.00
11	Didier **LAMKEL ZE** (Cmr)	(27) 17.09.96
12	Warren **TCHIMBEMBE** (Cgo)	(25) 21.04.98
14	Cheikh **SABALY** (Sen)	(25) 04.03.99
17	Benjamin **TETTEH** (Gha)	(26) 10.07.97
26	Malick **MBAYE** (Sen)	(19) 06.04.04
36	Ablie **JALLOW** (Gam)	(25) 14.11.98
37	Ibou **SANE** (Sen)	(18) 28.03.05
99	Joel **ASORO** (Swe)	(24) 27.04.99

COACH

Laszlo **BOLONI** (Rou)	(71) 11.03.53

MONACO

GOALKEEPERS

1	Radoslaw **MAJECKI** (Pol)	(24) 16.11.99
16	Philipp **KOHN** (Sui)	(25) 02.04.98
50	Yann **LIENARD**	(20) 16.03.03

DEFENDERS

2	**VANDERSON** (Bra)	(22) 21.06.01
3	Guillermo **MARIPAN** (Chi)	(29) 06.05.94
5	Thilo **KEHRER** (Ger)	(27) 21.09.96
12	**CAIO HENRIQUE** (Bra)	(26) 31.07.97
14	Ismail **JAKOBS** (Sen)	(24) 17.08.99
20	Kassoum **OUATTARA**	(19) 14.10.04
22	Mohammed **SALISU** (Gha)	(24) 17.04.99
43	Ritchy **VALME** (Hai)	(19) 03.02.05
46	Aurelien **PLATRET**	(21) 20.02.03
99	Wilfried **SINGO** (Civ)	(23) 25.12.00

MIDFIELDERS

4	Mohamed **CAMARA** (Mli)	(24) 06.01.00
6	Denis **ZAKARIA** (Sui)	(27) 20.11.96
7	Eliesse Ben **SEGHIR**	(19) 16.02.05
17	Aleksandr **GOLOVIN** (Rus)	(27) 30.05.96
18	Takumi **MINAMINO** (Jpn)	(29) 16.01.95
19	Youssouf **FOFANA**	(25) 10.01.99
21	Maghnes **AKLIOUCHE**	(22) 25.02.02
27	Krepin **DIATTA** (Sen)	(25) 25.02.99
33	Saimon **BOUABRE**	(17) 01.06.06
37	Edan **DIOP**	(19) 28.08.04
42	Mamadou **COULIBALY**	(19) 21.04.04
88	Soungoutou **MAGASSA**	(20) 08.10.03

FORWARDS

10	Wissam **BEN YEDDER**	(33) 12.08.90
29	Folarin **BALOGUN** (USA)	(22) 03.07.01
36	Breel **EMBOLO** (Sui)	(27) 14.02.97
47	Lucas **MICHAL**	(18) 22.06.05
48	Nazim **BABAI** (Alg)	(21) 14.01.03

COACH

Adi **HUTTER** (Aut)	(54) 11.02.70	

Monaco talisman...prolific striker and captain Wissam Ben Yedder

MONTPELLIER

GOALKEEPERS

1	Belmin **DIZDAREVIC** (Bih)	(22) 09.08.01
16	Dimitry **BERTAUD** (Cod)	(25) 06.06.98
40	Benjamin **LECOMTE**	(32) 26.04.91

DEFENDERS

3	Issiaga **SYLLA** (Gui)	(30) 01.01.94
4	Boubacar Kiki **KOUYATE** (Mli)	(26) 15.04.97
5	Modibo **SAGNAN**	(24) 14.04.99
6	Christopher **JULLIEN**	(30) 22.03.93
17	Theo **SAINTE-LUCE**	(25) 20.10.98
27	Becir **OMERAGIC** (Sui)	(22) 20.01.02
29	Enzo **TCHATO** (Cmr)	(21) 23.11.02
35	Lucas **MINCARELLI**	(20) 05.01.04
36	Silvan **HEFTI** (Sui)	(26) 25.10.97
37	Teo **ALLIX**	(19) 05.07.04
77	Falaye **SACKO** (Mli)	(28) 01.05.95

MIDFIELDERS

9	Mousa **AL TAMARI** (Jor)	(26) 10.06.97
10	Wahbi **KHAZRI** (Tun)	(33) 08.02.91
11	Teji **SAVANIER**	(32) 22.12.91
12	Jordan **FERRI**	(32) 12.03.92
13	Joris **CHOTARD**	(22) 24.09.01
18	Leo **LEROY**	(24) 14.02.00
19	Sacha **DELAYE**	(21) 23.04.02
22	Khalil **FAYAD**	(19) 09.06.04
38	Axel **GUEGUIN**	(18) 24.03.05

FORWARDS

7	Arnaud **NORDIN**	(25) 17.06.98
8	Akor **ADAMS** (Nga)	(24) 29.01.00
23	Yann **KARAMOH**	(25) 08.07.98
39	Yanis **ISSOUFOU**	(17) 28.10.06
41	Junior **NDIAYE**	(18) 29.03.05
42	Othmane **MAAMMA** (Mar)	(18) 06.10.05
43	Serigne **FAYE** (Sen)	(19) 05.04.04
70	Tanguy **COULIBALY**	(23) 18.02.01

COACH

Michel **DER ZAKARIAN** (Arm)	(61) 18.02.63	

NANTES

GOALKEEPERS

1	Alban **LAFONT**	(25) 23.01.99
16	Remy **DESCAMPS**	(27) 25.06.96
30	Denis **PETRIC** (Svn)	(35) 24.05.88
50	Hugo **BARBET**	(22) 22.11.01

DEFENDERS

2	Jean-Kevin **DUVERNE**	(26) 12.07.97
3	Nicolas **COZZA**	(25) 08.01.99
4	Nicolas **PALLOIS**	(36) 19.09.87
21	Jean-Charles **CASTELLETTO** (Cmr)	(29) 26.01.95
22	Yannis **M'BEMBA**	(22) 01.07.01
24	Eray **COMERT** (Sui)	(26) 04.02.98
43	Robin **VOISINE**	(21) 07.04.02
44	Nathan **ZEZE**	(18) 18.06.05
45	Bastien Meupiyou **MENADJOU**	(17) 19.03.06
46	Enzo **MONGO**	(18) 08.04.05
71	Hugo **BOUTSINGKHAM**	(21) 20.01.03
98	Kelvin **AMIAN**	(26) 08.02.98

MIDFIELDERS

5	Pedro **CHIRIVELLA** (Spa)	(26) 23.05.97
6	Douglas **AUGUSTO** (Bra)	(27) 13.01.97
8	Samuel **MOUTOUSSAMY** (Cod)	(27) 12.08.96
17	Moussa **SISSOKO**	(34) 16.08.89
19	Mohamed **ACHI**	(22) 16.01.02
25	Florent **MOLLET**	(32) 19.11.91

FORWARDS

7	Ignatius **GANAGO** (Cmr)	(25) 16.02.99
11	Marcus **COCO** (Glp)	(27) 24.06.96
12	Abdoul **BAMBA**	(29) 25.04.94
15	Tino **KADEWERE** (Zim)	(28) 05.01.96
23	Stredair **APPUAH**	(19) 27.06.04
27	Moses **SIMON** (Nga)	(28) 12.07.95
31	Mostafa **MOHAMED** (Egy)	(26) 28.11.97
39	Matthis **ABLINE**	(20) 28.03.03
54	Adel **MAHAMOUD** (Com)	(21) 04.02.03
59	Dehmaine **ASSOUMANI**	(18) 17.04.05
61	Joe-Loic **AFFAMAH**	(21) 29.06.02
77	Benie **TRAORE** (Civ)	(21) 30.11.02

COACH

Jocelyn **GOURVENNEC**	(51) 22.03.72	

NICE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Marcin **BULKA** (Pol)	(24) 04.10.99
31	Maxime **DUPE**	(31) 04.03.93
77	Teddy **BOULHENDI** (Alg)	(22) 09.04.01

DEFENDERS

2	Valentin **ROSIER**	(27) 19.08.96
4	**DANTE** (Bra)	(40) 18.10.83
6	Jean-Clair **TODIBO**	(24) 30.12.99
15	Romain **PERRAUD**	(26) 22.09.97
23	Jordan **LOTOMBA** (Sui)	(25) 29.09.98
26	Melvin **BARD**	(23) 06.11.00
32	Tom **LOUCHET**	(20) 04.05.03
33	Antoine **MENDY**	(19) 27.05.04
34	Yannis **NAHOUNOU**	(19) 16.05.04
44	Amidou **DOUMBOUYA**	(16) 05.08.07
55	Youssouf **NDAYISHIMIYE** (Bdi)	(25) 27.10.98

MIDFIELDERS

8	Pablo **ROSARIO** (Ned)	(27) 07.01.97
11	Morgan **SANSON**	(29) 18.08.94
18	Alexis **CLAUDE-MAURICE**	(25) 06.06.98
19	Khephren **THURAM**	(22) 26.03.01
21	Alexis **BEKA BEKA**	(22) 29.03.01
28	Hichem **BOUDAOUI** (Alg)	(24) 23.09.99
39	Daouda **TRAORE**	(17) 22.07.06

FORWARDS

7	Jeremie **BOGA** (Civ)	(27) 03.01.97
9	Terem **MOFFI** (Nga)	(24) 25.05.99
10	Sofiane **DIOP** (Mar)	(23) 09.06.00
24	Gaetan **LABORDE**	(29) 03.05.94
25	Mohamed-Ali **CHO**	(20) 19.01.04
27	Aliou **BALDE** (Sen)	(21) 12.12.02
29	Evann **GUESSAND**	(22) 01.07.01

COACH

Francesco **FARIOLI** (Ita)	(34) 10.04.89	

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN

GOALKEEPERS

1	Keylor **NAVAS** (Crc)	(37) 15.12.86
16	Sergio **RICO** (Spa)	(30) 01.09.93
30	Alexandre **LETELLIER**	(33) 11.12.90
80	Arnau **TENAS** (Spa)	(22) 30.05.01
99	Gianluigi **DONNARUMMA** (Ita)	(25) 25.02.99

DEFENDERS

2	Achraf **HAKIMI** (Mar)	(25) 04.11.98
3	Presnel **KIMPEMBE**	(28) 13.08.95
5	**MARQUINHOS** (Bra)	(29) 14.05.94
15	**DANILO** (Por)	(32) 09.09.91
21	Lucas **HERNANDEZ**	(28) 14.02.96
25	Nuno **MENDES** (Por)	(21) 19.06.02
26	Nordi **MUKIELE**	(26) 01.11.97
34	Serif **NHAGA** (Por)	(18) 01.09.05
35	Lucas **BERALDO** (Bra)	(20) 24.11.03
37	Milan **SKRINIAR** (Svk)	(29) 11.02.95
42	Yoram **ZAGUE**	(17) 15.05.06
97	Layvin **KURZAWA**	(31) 04.09.92

MIDFIELDERS

4	Manuel **UGARTE** (Uru)	(22) 11.04.01
8	**FABIAN** Ruiz (Spa)	(27) 03.04.96
17	**VITINHA** (Por)	(24) 13.02.00
19	**LEE** Kang-in (Kor)	(23) 19.02.01
28	Carlos **SOLER** (Spa)	(27) 02.01.97
33	Warren **ZAIRE-EMERY**	(18) 08.03.06
38	Ethan **MBAPPE**	(17) 29.12.06
41	Senny **MAYULU**	(17) 17.05.06

FORWARDS

7	Kylian **MBAPPE**	(25) 20.12.98
9	Goncalo **RAMOS** (Por)	(22) 20.06.01
10	Ousmane **DEMBELE**	(26) 15.05.97
11	Marco **ASENSIO** (Spa)	(28) 21.01.96
23	Randal Kolo **MUANI**	(25) 05.12.98
29	Bradley **BARCOLA**	(21) 02.09.02

COACH

Luis **ENRIQUE** (Spa)	(53) 08.05.70	

REIMS

GOALKEEPERS

16	Ludovic **BUTELLE**	(40) 03.04.83
94	Yehvann **DIOUF**	(24) 16.11.99
96	Alexandre **OLLIERO**	(28) 15.02.96

DEFENDERS

2	Joseph **OKUMU** (Ken)	(26) 26.05.97
4	Maxime **BUSI** (Bel)	(24) 14.10.99
5	Yunis **ABDELHAMID** (Mar)	(36) 28.09.87
18	Sergio **AKIEME** (Spa)	(26) 16.12.97
24	Emmanuel **AGBADOU** (Civ)	(26) 17.06.97
25	Thibault **DE SMET** (Bel)	(25) 05.06.98
32	Thomas **FOKET** (Bel)	(29) 25.09.94
45	Therence **KOUDOU**	(19) 13.12.04
46	Fallou **FALL** (Sen)	(19) 15.04.04
53	Arthur **TCHAPTCHET**	(17) 10.05.06
55	Nhoa **SANGUI**	(18) 27.02.06
56	Killian **PROUCHET**	(19) 23.01.05

MIDFIELDERS

6	Valentin Atangana **EDOA**	(18) 25.08.05
8	Amir **RICHARDSON** (Mar)	(22) 24.01.02
10	Teddy **TEUMA** (Mlt)	(30) 30.09.93
15	Marshall **MUNETSI** (Zim)	(27) 22.06.96
26	Benjamin **STAMBOULI**	(33) 13.08.90
48	Samuel **KOEBERLE**	(19) 26.11.04
71	Yaya **FOFANA** (Mli)	(19) 12.06.04

FORWARDS

7	Junya **ITO** (Jpn)	(31) 09.03.93
9	Mohamed **DARAMY** (Den)	(22) 07.01.02
14	Reda **KHADRA** (Ger)	(22) 04.07.01
17	Keito **NAKAMURA** (Jpn)	(23) 28.07.00
22	Oumar **DIAKITE** (Civ)	(20) 20.12.03
27	Adama **BOJANG** (Gam)	(19) 28.05.04
67	Mamadou **DIAKHON**	(18) 22.09.05

COACH

Will **STILL** (Bel)	(31) 14.10.92	

RENNES

GOALKEEPERS

1	Gauthier **GALLON**	(30) 23.04.93
30	Steve **MANDANDA**	(38) 28.03.85
40	Geoffrey **LEMBET** (Cta)	(35) 23.09.88
45	Yann **BATOLA**	(20) 26.01.04

DEFENDERS

3	Adrien **TRUFFERT**	(22) 20.11.01
5	Arthur **THEATE** (Bel)	(23) 25.05.00
15	Christopher **WOOH** (Cmr)	(22) 18.09.01
16	Jeanuel **BELOCIAN**	(19) 17.02.05
17	Guela **DOUE** (Civ)	(21) 17.10.02
23	Warmed **OMARI**	(23) 23.04.00
36	Alidu **SEIDU** (Gha)	(23) 04.06.00
43	Mahamadou **NAGIDA** (Cmr)	(18) 28.06.05

MIDFIELDERS

6	Azor **MATUSIWA** (Ned)	(25) 28.04.98
8	Baptiste **SANTAMARIA**	(29) 09.03.95
11	Ludovic **BLAS**	(26) 31.12.97
14	Benjamin **BOURIGEAUD**	(30) 14.01.94
28	Enzo **LE FEE**	(24) 03.02.00
32	Fabian **RIEDER** (Sui)	(22) 16.02.02
33	Desire **DOUE**	(18) 03.06.05
34	Ibrahim **SALAH** (Mar)	(22) 30.08.01

FORWARDS

7	Martin **TERRIER**	(27) 04.03.97
9	Arnaud **KALIMUENDO**	(22) 20.01.02
10	Amine **GOUIRI** (Alg)	(24) 16.02.00
39	Mathis **LAMBOURDE**	(18) 09.01.06
99	Bertug **YILDIRIM** (Tur)	(21) 12.07.02

COACH

Julien **STEPHAN**	(43) 18.09.80	

STRASBOURG

GOALKEEPERS

1	Matthieu **DREYER**	(34) 20.03.89
30	Alexandre **PIERRE** (Hai)	(23) 25.02.01
36	Alaa **BELLAAROUCH** (Mar)	(22) 01.02.02

DEFENDERS

2	Frederic **GUILBERT**	(29) 24.12.94
3	Thomas **DELAINE**	(31) 24.03.92
4	Karol **FILA** (Pol)	(25) 13.06.98
5	Lucas **PERRIN**	(25) 19.11.98
13	Saidou **SOW** (Gui)	(21) 04.07.02
18	Junior **MWANGA**	(20) 11.05.03
24	Abakar **SYLLA** (Civ)	(21) 25.12.02
25	Steven **BASEYA**	(19) 14.01.05
28	Marvin **SENAYA**	(23) 28.01.01
29	Ismael **DOUKOURE**	(20) 24.07.03
39	Elies Araar **FERNANDEZ** (Tun)	(17) 07.10.06

MIDFIELDERS

6	Jean-Eudes **AHOLOU** (Civ)	(29) 20.03.94
7	Jessy **DEMINGUET**	(26) 07.01.98
8	**ANDREY SANTOS** (Bra)	(19) 03.05.04
14	Sanjin **PRCIC** (Bih)	(30) 20.11.93
19	Habib **DIARRA**	(20) 03.01.04
27	Ibrahima **SISSOKO** (Mli)	(26) 27.10.97
35	Samir **EL MOURABET** (Mar)	(18) 06.10.05
41	Rabby **NZINGOULA**	(18) 25.11.05

FORWARDS

9	Kevin **GAMEIRO**	(36) 09.05.87
10	Emanuel **EMEGHA** (Ned)	(21) 03.02.03
11	Moise **SAHI** (Civ)	(22) 20.12.01
12	Lebo **MOTHIBA** (RSA)	(28) 28.01.96
23	**ANGELO** (Bra)	(19) 21.12.04
26	Dilane **BAKWA**	(21) 26.08.02
33	Tom **SAETTEL**	(18) 19.06.05
37	Mohamed **BECHIKH**	(18) 13.07.05
40	Jeremy **SEBAS** (Mtq)	(20) 14.04.03

COACH

Patrick **VIEIRA**	(47) 23.06.76	

TOULOUSE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Thomas **HIMEUR**	(23) 17.01.01
30	Alex **DOMINGUEZ** (Spa)	(25) 30.07.98
40	Justin **LACOMBE**	(20) 09.04.03
50	Guillaume **RESTES**	(19) 11.03.05

DEFENDERS

2	Rasmus **NICOLAISEN** (Den)	(26) 16.03.97
3	Mikkel **DESLER** (Den)	(29) 19.02.95
6	**LOGAN COSTA** (Cpv)	(22) 01.04.01
12	Warren **KAMANZI** (Nor)	(23) 11.11.00
13	Christian **MAWISSA**	(18) 18.04.05
17	Gabriel **SUAZO** (Chi)	(26) 09.08.97
23	Moussa **DIARRA** (Mli)	(23) 10.11.00
25	Kevin **KEBEN** (Cmr)	(20) 26.01.04
26	Ilyes **ARADJ**	(18) 05.06.05
32	Nicolas **WASBAUER**	(19) 04.07.04

MIDFIELDERS

4	Stijn **SPIERINGS** (Ned)	(28) 12.03.96
5	Denis **GENREAU** (Aus)	(24) 21.05.99
8	Vincent **SIERRO** (Sui)	(28) 08.10.95
11	Cesar **GELABERT** (Spa)	(23) 31.10.00
20	Niklas **SCHMIDT** (Ger)	(26) 01.03.98
22	Naatan **SKYTTA** (Fin)	(21) 07.05.02
24	Cristian **CASSERES Jr.** (Ven)	(24) 20.01.00
31	Edhy **ZULIANI** (Alg)	(19) 11.08.04
34	Noah **LAHMADI**	(19) 05.01.05
37	Yann **GBOHO**	(23) 14.01.01

FORWARDS

7	Zakaria **ABOUKHLAL** (Mar)	(24) 18.02.00
9	Thijs **DALLINGA** (Ned)	(23) 03.08.00
10	Ibrahim **CISSOKO** (Ned)	(20) 26.03.03
15	Aron **DONNUM** (Nor)	(25) 20.04.98
19	Frank **MAGRI** (Cmr)	(24) 04.09.99
31	Noah **EDJOUMA**	(18) 04.10.05
33	Bonota **TRAORE**	(20) 30.06.03
80	Shavy Warren **BABICKA** (Gab)	(23) 01.06.00

COACH

Carles **MARTINEZ NOVELL** (Spa)	(39) 18.05.84	

(ages as of 15.03.24)

Internationals

2023 AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS

Group A

Jan 13 – Abidjan
Ivory Coast 2 (S. Fofana 4, Krasso 58)
Guinea-Bissau 0

Jan 14 – Abidjan
Nigeria 1 (Osimhen 38)
Equatorial Guinea 1 (Iban Edu 36)

Jan 18 – Abidjan
Equatorial Guinea 4 (Nsue 21, 51, 61, Miranda 46)
Guinea-Bissau 2 (Esteban 37 og, Ze Turbo 90+3)

Jan 18 – Abidjan
Ivory Coast 0
Nigeria 1 (Troost-Ekong 55 pen)

Jan 22 – Abidjan
Equatorial Guinea 4 (Nsue 42, 75, Ganet 73, Jannick 88)
Ivory Coast 0

Jan 22 – Abidjan
Guinea-Bissau 0
Nigeria 1 (Sangante 36 og)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Eq. Guinea (Q)	3	2	1	0	9	3	7
Nigeria (Q)	3	2	1	0	3	1	7
Ivory Coast (Q)	3	1	0	2	2	5	3
Guinea-Bissau	3	0	0	3	2	7	0

Group B

Jan 14 – Abidjan
Egypt 2 (Mohamed 2, Salah 90+7 pen)
Mozambique 2 (Witi 55, Clesio 58)

Jan 14 – Abidjan
Ghana 1 (Djiku 56)
Cape Verde 2 (Monteiro 17, Rodrigues 90+2)

Jan 18 – Abidjan
Egypt 2 (Marmoush 69, Mohamed 74)
Ghana 2 (Kudus 45+3, 71)

Jan 19 – Abidjan
Cape Verde 3 (Bebe 32, Mendes 51, Pina 69)
Mozambique 0

Jan 22 – Abidjan
Mozambique 2 (Geny 90+1 pen, Reinildo 90+4)
Ghana 2 (J. Ayew 15 pen, 70 pen)

Jan 22 – Abidjan
Cape Verde 2 (Gilson 45+1, Teixeira 90+9)
Egypt 2 (Trezeguet 50, Mohamed 90+3)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cape Verde (Q)	3	2	1	0	7	3	7
Egypt (Q)	3	0	3	0	6	6	3
Ghana	3	0	2	1	5	6	2
Mozambique	3	0	2	1	4	7	2

Group C

Jan 15 – Yamoussoukro
Senegal 3 (P. Gueye 4, Camara 52, 86)
Gambia 0

Jan 15 – Yamoussoukro
Cameroon 1 (Magri 51)
Guinea 1 (Bayo 10)

Jan 19 – Yamoussoukro
Senegal 3 (I. Sarr 16, H. Diallo 71, Mane 90+5)
Cameroon 1 (Castelletto 83)

Jan 19 – Yamoussoukro
Guinea 1 (A. Camara 69)
Gambia 0

Jan 23 – Yamoussoukro
Guinea 0
Senegal 2 (Seck 61, I. Ndiaye 90)

Jan 23 – Bouake
Gambia 2 (Jallow 72, E. Colley 85)
Cameroon 3 (Toko Ekambi 56, Gomez 87 og, Wooh 90+1)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Senegal (Q)	3	3	0	0	8	1	9
Cameroon (Q)	3	1	1	1	5	6	4
Guinea (Q)	3	1	1	1	2	3	4
Gambia	3	0	0	3	2	7	0

Group D

Jan 15 – Bouake
Algeria 1 (Bounedjah 18)
Angola 1 (Mabululu 68 pen)

Jan 16 – Bouake
Burkina Faso 1 (Traore 90+6 pen)
Mauritania 0

Jan 20 – Bouake
Algeria 2 (Bounedjah 51, 90+5)
Burkina Faso 2 (M. Konate 45+3, Traore 71 pen)

Jan 20 – Bouake
Mauritania 2 (Bouna Amar 43, Koita 58)
Angola 3 (Gelson Dala 30, 50, Gilberto 53)

Jan 23 – Yamoussoukro
Angola 2 (Mabululu 36, Zini 90+2)
Burkina Faso 0

Jan 23 – Bouake
Mauritania 1 (Dellahi Yali 37)
Algeria 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Angola (Q)	3	2	1	0	6	3	7
Burkina Faso (Q)	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Mauritania (Q)	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Algeria	3	0	2	1	3	4	2

Group E

Jan 16 – Korhogo
Tunisia 0
Namibia 1 (Hotto 88)

Jan 16 – Korhogo
Mali 2 (H. Traore 60, Sinayoko 66)
South Africa 0

Jan 20 – Korhogo
Tunisia 1 (Rafia 20)
Mali 1 (Sinayoko 10)

Jan 21 – Korhogo
S. Africa 4 (Tau 14 pen, Zwane 25, 40, Maseko 75)
Namibia 0

Jan 24 – Korhogo
South Africa 0
Tunisia 0

Jan 24 – San-Pedro
Namibia 0
Mali 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mali (Q)	3	1	2	0	3	1	5
South Africa (Q)	3	1	1	1	4	2	4
Namibia (Q)	3	1	1	1	1	4	4
Tunisia	3	0	2	1	1	2	2

Group F

Jan 17 – San-Pedro
Morocco 3 (Saiss 30, Ounahi 77, En-Nesyri 80)
Tanzania 0

Jan 17 – San-Pedro
DR Congo 1 (Wissa 27)
Zambia 1 (Kangwa 23)

Jan 21 – San-Pedro
Morocco 1 (Hakimi 6)
DR Congo 1 (Silas 76)

Jan 21 – San-Pedro
Zambia 1 (Daka 88)
Tanzania 1 (Msuva 11)

Jan 24 – Korhogo
Tanzania 0
DR Congo 0

Jan 24 – San-Pedro
Zambia 0
Morocco 1 (Ziyech 37)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco (Q)	3	2	1	0	5	1	7
DR Congo (Q)	3	0	3	0	2	2	3
Zambia	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
Tanzania	3	0	2	1	1	4	2

Last 16

Jan 27 – Bouake
Angola 3 (Gelson Dala 38, 42, Mabululu 66)
Namibia 0

Jan 27 – Abidjan
Nigeria 2 (Lookman 36, 90)
Cameroon 0

Jan 28 – Abidjan
Equatorial Guinea 0
Guinea 1 (Bayo 90+8)

Jan 28 – San-Pedro
Egypt 1 (Mostafa 45+1)
DR Congo 1 (Elia 37)
After Extra-Time. DR Congo win 8-7 on pens

Jan 29 – Abidjan
Cape Verde 1 (Mendes 88 pen)
Mauritania 0

Jan 29 – Yamoussoukro
Senegal 1 (H. Diallo 4)
Ivory Coast 1 (Kessi 86 pen)
After Extra-Time. Ivory Coast win 5-4 on pens

Jan 30 – Korhogo
Mali 2 (E. Tapsoba 3 og, Sinayoko 47)
Burkina Faso 1 (Traore 57 pen)

Jan 30 – San-Pedro
Morocco 0
South Africa 2 (Makgopa 57, Mokoena 90+5)

Quarter-Finals

Feb 2 – Abidjan
Nigeria 1 (Lookman 41)
Angola 0

Feb 2 – Abidjan
DR Congo 3 (Mbemba 27, Wissa 65 pen, Masuaku 82)
Guinea 1 (Bayo 21 pen)

Feb 3 – Bouake
Mali 1 (Dorgeles 71)
Ivory Coast 2 (Adingra 90, Diakite 120+2)
After Extra-Time

Feb 3 – Yamoussoukro
Cape Verde 0
South Africa 0
After Extra-Time. South Africa win 2-1 on pens

Semi-Finals

Feb 7 – Bouake
Nigeria 1 (Troost-Ekong 67 pen)
South Africa 1 (Mokoena 90 pen)
After Extra-Time. Nigeria win 4-2 on pens

Feb 7 – Abidjan
Ivory Coast 1 (Haller 65)
DR Congo 0

Third-Place Play-Off

Feb 10 – Abidjan
South Africa 0
DR Congo 0
After Extra-Time. South Africa win 6-5 on pens

Final

Feb 11 – Abidjan
Nigeria 1 (Troost-Ekong 38)
Ivory Coast 2 (Kessie 62, Haller 81)
Nigeria: Nwabali – Ajayi, Troost-Ekong, Bassey; Aina, Onyeka (Moffi 86), Iwobi (Yusuf 79), Sanusi (Aribo 86); Chukwueze (Simon 56), Lookman (Iheanacho 79); Osimhen.
Ivory Coast: Y. Fofana – Aurier (Singo 70), Kossounou, Ndicka, Konan; Kessie, Seri (Amani 90+2), S. Fofana (I. Sangare 88); Gradel (Diakite 70), Haller (Krasso 88), Adingra.

2023 ASIAN CUP

Group A

Jan 12 – Lusail
Qatar 3 (Afif 45, 90+6, Almoez 56)
Lebanon 0

Jan 13 – Doha
China 0
Tajikistan 0

Jan 17 – Doha
Lebanon 0
China 0

Jan 17 – Al Khor
Tajikistan 0
Qatar 1 (Afif 17)

Jan 22 – Al Rayyan
Qatar 1 (Al Haydos 66)
China 0

Jan 22 – Al Rayyan
Tajikistan 2 (Umarboev 80, Khamrokulov 90+2)
Lebanon 1 (Jradi 47)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Qatar (Q)	3	3	0	0	5	0	9
Tajikistan (Q)	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
China	3	0	2	1	0	1	2
Lebanon	3	0	1	2	1	5	1

Group B

Jan 13 – Al Rayyan
Australia 2 (Irvine 50, Bos 73)
India 0

Jan 13 – Al Rayyan
Uzbekistan 0
Syria 0

Jan 18 – Al Rayyan
Syria 0
Australia 1 (Irvine 59)

Jan 18 – Al Rayyan
India 0
Uzbekistan 3 (Fayzullaev 4, Sergeev 18, Nasrullaev 45+4)

Jan 23 – Al Wakrah
Australia 1 (Boyle 45+1)
Uzbekistan 1 (Turgunboev 78)

Jan 23 – Al Khor
Syria 1 (Khrbin 76)
India 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Australia (Q)	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Uzbekistan (Q)	3	1	2	0	4	1	5
Syria (Q)	3	1	1	1	1	1	4
India	3	0	0	3	0	6	0

Group C

Jan 14 – Al Rayyan
United Arab Emirates 3 (Adil 34 pen, Sultan 52, Al Ghassani 90+5 pen)
Hong Kong 1 (Chan Siu Kwan 49)

Jan 14 – Al Rayyan
Iran 4 (Ansarifard 2, Khalilzadeh 12, Ghayedi 38, Azmoun 55)
Palestine 1 (Seyam 45+6)

Jan 18 – Al Wakrah
Palestine 1 (Nasser 50 og)
United Arab Emirates 1 (Adil 23)

Jan 19 – Al Rayyan
Hong Kong 0
Iran 1 (Ghayedi 24)

Jan 23 – Al Rayyan
Iran 2 (Taremi 26, 65)
United Arab Emirates 1 (Al Ghassani 90+3)

Jan 23 – Doha
Hong Kong 0
Palestine 3 (Dabbagh 12, 60, Qunbar 48)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran (Q)	3	3	0	0	7	2	9
UAE (Q)	3	1	1	1	5	4	4
Palestine (Q)	3	1	1	1	5	5	4
Hong Kong	3	0	0	3	1	7	0

Group D

Jan 14 – Doha
Japan 4 (Minamino 11, 45, Nakamura 45+4, Ueda 85)
Vietnam 2 (Nguyen Dinh Bac 16, Pham Tuan Hai 33)

Jan 15 – Al Rayyan
Indonesia 1 (Marselino 37)
Iraq 3 (M. Ali 17, Rashid 45+7, Hussein 75)

Jan 19 – Al Rayyan
Iraq 2 (Hussein 5, 45+4)
Japan 1 (Endo 90+3)

Jan 19 – Doha
Vietnam 0
Indonesia 1 (Asnawi 42 pen)

Jan 24 – Doha
Japan 3 (Ueda 6 pen, 52, Hubner 88 og)
Indonesia 1 (Walsh 90+1)

Jan 24 – Al Rayyan
Iraq 3 (Sulaka 47, Hussein 73, 90+12 pen)
Vietnam 2 (Bui Hoang Viet Anh 42, Nguyen Quang Hai 90+1)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iraq (Q)	3	3	0	0	8	4	9
Japan (Q)	3	2	0	1	8	5	6
Indonesia (Q)	3	1	0	2	3	6	3
Vietnam	3	0	0	3	4	8	0

Group E

Jan 15 – Al Rayyan
South Korea 3 (Hwang In-beom 38, Lee Kang-in 56, 68)
Bahrain 1 (Al Hashash 51)

Jan 15 – Al Wakrah
Malaysia 0
Jordan 4 (Al Mardi 12, 32, Al Tamari 18 pen, 85)

Jan 20 – Doha
Jordan 2 (Park Yong-woo 37 og, Al Naimat 45+6)
S. Korea 2 (Son Heung-min 9 pen, Al Arab 90+1 og)

Jan 20 – Al Rayyan
Bahrain 1 (Madan 90+5)
Malaysia 0

Jan 25 – Al Wakrah
South Korea 3 (Jeong Woo-yeong 21, Lee Kang-in 83, Son Heung-min 90+4 pen)
Malaysia 3 (Faisal 51, Arif 62 pen, Romel 90+15)

Jan 25 – Al Rayyan
Jordan 0
Bahrain 1 (Yusuf Helal 34)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bahrain (Q)	3	2	0	1	3	3	6
South Korea (Q)	3	1	2	0	8	6	5
Jordan (Q)	3	1	1	1	6	3	4
Malaysia	3	0	1	2	3	8	1

Group F

Jan 16 – Doha
Thailand 2 (Supachai 26, 48)
Kyrgyzstan 0

Jan 16 – Al Rayyan
Saudi Arabia 2 (Ghareeb 78, Al Bulayhi 90+6)
Oman 1 (Al Yahyaei 14 pen)

Jan 21 – Doha
Oman 0
Thailand 0

Jan 21 – Al Rayyan
Kyrgyzstan 0
Saudi Arabia 2 (Kanno 35, Al Ghamdi 84)

Jan 25 – Al Rayyan
Saudi Arabia 0
Thailand 0

Jan 25 – Doha
Kyrgyzstan 1 (Joel 80)
Oman 1 (Al Ghassani 8)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saudi Arabia (Q)	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Thailand (Q)	3	1	2	0	2	0	5
Oman	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
Kyrgyzstan	3	0	1	2	1	5	1

Last 16

Jan 28 – Al Rayyan
Australia 4 (Baggott 12 og, Boyle 45, Goodwin 89, Souttar 90+1)
Indonesia 0

Jan 28 – Al Rayyan
Tajikistan 1 (Hanonov 30)
United Arab Emirates 1 (Al Hammadi 90+5)
After Extra-Time. Tajikistan win 5-3 on pens

Jan 29 – Al Rayyan
Iraq 2 (Natiq 68, Hussein 76)
Jordan 3 (Al Naimat 45+1, Al Arab 90+5, Al Rashdan 90+7)

Jan 29 – Al Khor
Qatar 2 (Al Haydos 45+6, Afif 49 pen)
Palestine 1 (Dabbagh 37)

Jan 30 – Al Wakrah
Uzbekistan 2 (Turgunboev 37, Fayzullaev 65)
Thailand 1 (Supachok 58)

Jan 30 – Al Rayyan
Saudi Arabia 1 (Radif 46)
South Korea 1 (Cho Gue-sung 90+9)
After Extra-Time. South Korea win 4-2 on pens

Jan 31 – Doha
Bahrain 1 (Ueda 64 og)
Japan 3 (Doan 31, Kubo 49, Ueda 72)

Jan 31 – Doha
Iran 1 (Taremi 34 pen)
Syria 1 (Khrbin 64 pen)
After Extra-Time. Iran win 5-3 on pens

Quarter-Finals

Feb 2 – Al Rayyan
Tajikistan 0
Jordan 1 (Hanonov 66 og)

Feb 2 – Al Wakrah
Australia 1 (Goodwin 42)
South Korea 2 (Hwang Hee-chan 90+6 pen, Son Heung-min 104)
After Extra-Time

Feb 3 – Al Rayyan
Iran 2 (Mohebi 55, Jahanbakhsh 90+6 pen)
Japan 1 (Morita 28)

Feb 3 – Al Khor
Qatar 1 (Al Haydos 21)
Uzbekistan 1 (Hamrobekov 59)
After Extra-Time. Qatar win 3-2 on pens

Semi-Finals

Feb 6 – Al Rayyan
Jordan 2 (Al Naimat 53, Al Tamari 66)
South Korea 0

Feb 7 – Doha
Iran 2 (Azmoun 4, Jahanbakhsh 51 pen)
Qatar 3 (Gaber 17, Afif 43, Almoez 82)

Final

Feb 10 – Lusail
Jordan 1 (Al Naimat 67)
Qatar 3 (Afif 22 pen, 73 pen, 90+5 pen)
Jordan: Abulaila – Nasib, Al Arab, Al Ajalin; Haddad, Al Rashdan, Al Rawabdeh, Al Mardi (Ratib 80); Al Tamari, Olwan (Al Awadat 90+5); Al Naimat.
Qatar: Barsham – Salman, Ali Mukhtar (Khoukhi 81), Lucas Mendes, Waad; Gaber (Asad 53), Fathy; Abdurisag (Ismail 63), Al Haydos (Hatem 53), Afif; Almoez.

2026 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

ASIA Section

● *8 direct slots available, plus 1 play-off slot*

Second Round

Group A
Mar 21: Afghanistan v India; Qatar v Kuwait
Mar 26: India v Afghanistan; Kuwait v Qatar

Group B
Mar 21: Myanmar v Syria; Japan v North Korea
Mar 26: Syria v Myanmar; North Korea v Japan

Group C
Mar 21: S. Korea v Thailand; Singapore v China
Mar 26: China v Singapore; Thailand v S. Korea

Group D
Mar 21:
Chinese Taipei v Kyrgyzstan; Oman v Malaysia
Mar 26:
Kyrgyzstan v Chinese Taipei; Malaysia v Oman

Group E
Mar 21:
Hong Kong v Uzbekistan; Iran v Turkmenistan
Mar 26:
Uzbekistan v Hong Kong; Turkmenistan v Iran

Group F
Mar 21: Indonesia v Vietnam; Iraq v Philippines
Mar 26: Vietnam v Indonesia; Philippines v Iraq

Group G
Mar 21: Pakistan v Jordan; Saudi Arabia v Tajikistan
Mar 26: Jordan v Pakistan; Tajikistan v Saudi Arabia

Group H
Mar 21: Nepal v Bahrain; UAE v Yemen
Mar 26: Bahrain v Nepal; Yemen v UAE

Group I
Mar 21:
Australia v Lebanon; Palestine v Bangladesh
Mar 26:
Bangladesh v Palestine; Lebanon v Australia

CONCACAF Section

● *3 direct slots available, plus 2 play-off slots (along with the 3 host nations)*

First Round
Mar 22: Anguilla v Turks & Caicos; US Virgin Islands v British Virgin Islands
Mar 26: Turks & Caicos v Anguilla; British Virgin Islands v US Virgin Islands
Winners advance to second round group stage

EURO 2024 QUALIFIERS

Play-Offs

Path A
Mar 21: Wales v Finland; Poland v Estonia
Winners meet in the final on March 26

Path B
Mar 21:
Bosnia & Herzegovina v Ukraine; Israel v Iceland
Winners meet in the final on March 26

Path C
Mar 21:
Georgia v Luxembourg; Greece v Kazakhstan
Winners meet in the final on March 26

2024-25 UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE DRAW

League A
Group A1
Croatia, Portugal, Poland, Scotland
Group A2
Italy, Belgium, France, Israel
Group A3
Netherlands, Hungary, Germany, Bosnia & Herzegovina
Group A4
Spain, Denmark, Switzerland, Serbia

League B
Group B1
Czech Republic, Ukraine, Albania, Georgia
Group B2
England, Finland, Republic of Ireland, Greece
Group B3
Austria, Norway, Slovenia, Kazakhstan
Group B4
Wales, Iceland, Montenegro, Turkey

League C
Group C1
Sweden, Azerbaijan, Slovakia, Estonia
Group C2
Romania, Kosovo, Cyprus, Gibraltar/Lithuania
Group C3
Luxembourg, Bulgaria, Northern Ireland, Belarus
Group C4
Armenia, Faroe Islands, North Macedonia, Latvia

League D
Group D1
Gibraltar/Lithuania, San Marino, Liechtenstein
Group D2
Moldova, Malta, Andorra

2023-24 CONCACAF NATIONS LEAGUE FINALS

Semi-Finals
Mar 21: USA v Jamaica; Panama v Mexico
Winners meet in the final, losers face each other in the third place play-off, both on March 24

2024 COPA AMERICA QUALIFIERS

Play-Offs
Mar 23:
Canada v Trinidad & Tobago; Costa Rica v Honduras
Winners qualify for 2024 Copa America

2024 SOUTH AMERICAN OLYMPIC QUALIFIERS

Group A

Jan 20 – Caracas
Ecuador 3 (Medina 71, 88, Zambrano 86)
Colombia 0

Jan 20 – Caracas
Venezuela 3 (Lacava 37, Bolivar 42, Rivas 63)
Bolivia 3 (Briceno 31, Chavez 83, Villamil 90+6)

Jan 23 – Caracas
Bolivia 0
Brazil 1 (Endrick 4)

Jan 23 – Caracas
Ecuador 1 (Medina 70)
Venezuela 1 (Kelsy 20)

Jan 26 – Caracas
Bolivia 0
Ecuador 2 (J. Mercado 22, Obando 90+3)

Jan 26 – Caracas
Brazil 2 (Endrick 25, John Kennedy 83)
Colombia 0

Jan 29 – Caracas
Brazil 2 (Marlon Gomes 65, Gabriel Pirani 75)
Ecuador 1 (P. Mercado 59)

Jan 29 – Caracas
Colombia 0
Venezuela 1 (Bolivar 34)

Feb 1 – Caracas
Venezuela 3 (Segovia 10, 31, Rikelme 55 og)
Brazil 1 (Alexsander 90)

Feb 1 – Valencia
Colombia 0
Bolivia 2 (Briceno 9, 29)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil*	4	3	0	1	6	4	9
Venezuela*	4	2	2	0	8	5	8
Ecuador	4	2	1	1	7	3	7
Bolivia	4	1	1	2	5	6	4
Colombia	4	0	0	4	0	8	0

**Advance to final stage*

Group B

Jan 21 – Valencia
Peru 1 (Flores 67)
Chile 0

Jan 21 – Valencia
Argentina 1 (Gondou 90)
Paraguay 1 (D. Gomez 67 pen)

Jan 24 – Valencia
Peru 0
Argentina 2 (Almada 53 pen, Gondou 87)

Jan 24 – Valencia
Paraguay 4 (De Jesus 30, D. Gomez 44, 72, Fernandez 54)
Uruguay 3 (L. Rodriguez 8, 11, 34)

Jan 27 – Valencia
Paraguay 1 (Fernandez 18)
Peru 0

Jan 27 – Valencia
Uruguay 0
Chile 1 (Montes 64)

Jan 30 – Valencia
Uruguay 3 (L. Rodriguez 44 pen, Homenchenko 45+1, Sanchez 48)
Peru 0

Jan 30 – Valencia
Chile 0
Argentina 5 (Almada 45, 57 pen, Castro 61, Quiros 79, Gondou 90+1)

Feb 2 – Valencia
Argentina 3 (Rodriguez 7, Quiros 11, Gonzalez 25)
Uruguay 3 (L. Rodriguez 19, Araujo 41, Abaldo 61)

Feb 2 – Caracas
Chile 2 (Tapia 31, Assadi 70)
Paraguay 1 (Leguizamon 33)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Argentina*	4	2	2	0	11	4	8
Paraguay*	4	2	1	1	7	6	7
Chile	4	2	0	2	3	7	6
Uruguay	4	1	1	2	9	8	4
Peru	4	1	0	3	1	6	3

**Advance to final stage*

Final Stage

Feb 5 – Caracas
Brazil 0
Paraguay 1 (Peralta 45+2)

Feb 5 – Caracas
Argentina 2 (Vivas 39 og, Almada 61)
Venezuela 2 (Brey 16 og, Kelsy 90+10 pen)

Feb 8 – Caracas
Argentina 3 (Solari 3, Almada 84 pen, Redondo 90+7)
Paraguay 3 (Nunez 70, D. Gomez 42, E. Gonzalez 90)

Feb 8 – Caracas
Venezuela 1 (Bolivar 67)
Brazil 2 (Mauricio 57, Guilherme Biro 88)

Feb 11 – Caracas
Paraguay 2 (D. Gomez 48 pen, Perez 75)
Venezuela 0

Feb 11 – Caracas
Brazil 0
Argentina 1 (Gondou 78)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Paraguay (Q)	3	2	1	0	6	3	7
Argentina (Q)	3	1	2	0	6	5	5
Brazil	3	1	0	2	2	3	3
Venezuela	3	0	1	2	3	6	1

Club Football

EUROPE

2023-24 CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Last 16 – 1st Leg

Feb 13 – Copenhagen
FC Copenhagen (Den) 1 (Mattsson 34)
Manchester City (Eng) 3 (De Bruyne 10, B. Silva 45+1, Foden 90+2)

Feb 13 – Leipzig
RB Leipzig (Ger) 0
Real Madrid (Spa) 1 (Brahim 48)

Feb 14 – Rome
Lazio (Ita) 1 (Immobile 69 pen)
Bayern Munich (Ger) 0

Feb 14 – Paris
PSG (Fra) 2 (K. Mbappe 58, Barcola 70)
Real Sociedad (Spa) 0

Feb 20 – Milan
Internazionale (Ita) 1 (Arnautovic 79)
Atletico Madrid (Spa) 0

Feb 20 – Eindhoven
PSV (Ned) 1 (De Jong 56 pen)
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 1 (Malen 24)

Feb 21 – Naples
Napoli (Ita) 1 (Osimhen 75)
Barcelona (Spa) 1 (Lewandowski 60)

Feb 21 – Porto
Porto (Por) 1 (Galeno 90+4)
Arsenal (Eng) 0

2023-24 EUROPA LEAGUE

Knockout Round Play-Off – 1st Leg

Feb 15 – Lisbon
Benfica (Por) 2 (Di Maria 68 pen, 90+8 pen)
Toulouse (Fra) 1 (Desler 75)

Feb 15 – Braga
Braga (Por) 2 (Banza 44, Moutinho 90+1 pen)
Qarabag (Aze) 4 (Jankovic 21 pen, Zoubir 54, 69, Juninho 65)

Feb 15 – Rotterdam
Feyenoord (Ned) 1 (Paixao 45+1)
Roma (Ita) 1 (Lukaku 67)

Feb 15 – Istanbul
Galatasaray (Tur) 3 (Demirbay 19, Mertens 61, Icardi 90+1)
Sparta Prague (Cze) 2 (Preciado 47, Kuchta 65)

Feb 15 – Lens
Lens (Fra) 0
Freiburg (Ger) 0

Feb 15 – Milan
Milan (Ita) 3 (Loftus-Cheek 32, 47, Leao 53)
Rennes (Fra) 0

Feb 15 – Hamburg
Shakhtar (Ukr) 2 (Matviyenko 68, Eguinaldo 90+3)
Marseille (Fra) 2 (Aubameyang 64, Ndiaye 90)

Feb 15 – Bern
Young Boys (Sui) 1 (Ugrinic 42)
Sporting (Por) 3 (Amenda 31 og, Gyokeres 41 pen, Inacio 48)

Knockout Round Play-Off – 2nd Leg

Feb 22 – Lisbon
Sporting (Por) 1 (Gyokeres 13)
Young Boys (Sui) 1 (Ganvoula 84 pen)
Sporting win 4-2 on aggregate

Feb 22 – Freiburg
Freiburg (Ger) 3 (Sallai 67, 90+2, Gregoritsch 99)
Lens (Fra) 2 (Costa 28, Wahi 45+2)
After Extra-Time. Freiburg win 3-2 on aggregate

Feb 22 – Marseille
Marseille (Fra) 3 (Aubameyang 23, Sarr 74, Kondogbia 81)
Shakhtar (Ukr) 1 (Sudakov 12 pen)
Marseille win 5-3 on aggregate

Feb 22 – Baku
Qarabag (Aze) 2 (Silva 102, Akhundzade 120+2)
Braga (Por) 3 (Fernandes 70, Djalo 83, Banza 115 pen)
Qarabag win 6-5 on aggregate

Feb 22 – Rennes
Rennes (Fra) 3 (Bourigeaud 11, 54 pen, 68 pen)
Milan (Ita) 2 (Jovic 22, Leao 58)
Milan win 5-3 on aggregate

Feb 22 – Rome
Roma (Ita) 1 (Pellegrini 15)
Feyenoord (Ned) 1 (Gimenez 5)
After Extra-Time. 2-2 on aggregate
Roma win 4-2 on pens

Feb 22 – Prague
Sparta Prague (Cze) 4 (Preciado 8, Tuci 74, Haraslin 80, Kuchta 90+6)
Galatasaray (Tur) 1 (Bardakci 16)
Sparta Prague win 6-4 on aggregate

Feb 22 – Toulouse
Toulouse (Fra) 0
Benfica (Por) 0
Benfica win 2-1 on aggregate

Last 16 Draw

Sparta Prague v Liverpool; Marseille v Villarreal; Roma v Brighton; Benfica v Rangers; Freiburg v West Ham United; Sporting v Atalanta; Milan v Slavia Prague; Qarabag v Bayer Leverkusen

2023-24 CONFERENCE LEAGUE

Knockout Round Play-Off – 1st Leg

Feb 15 – Amsterdam
Ajax (Ned) 2 (Van den Boomen 90+1 pen, Berghuis 90+7)
Bodo/Glimt (Nor) 2 (Gronbaek 16, 64)

Feb 15 – Budapest
Maccabi Haifa (Isr) 1 (Pierrot 65)
Gent (Bel) 0

Feb 15 – Molde
Molde (Nor) 3 (Gulbrandsen 12, 19, Kaasa 24)
Legia Warsaw (Pol) 2 (Josue 64, Augustyniak 71)

Feb 15 – Piraeus
Olympiakos (Gre) 1 (El Kaabi 83)
Ferencvaros (Hun) 0

Feb 15 – Seville
Real Betis (Spa) 0
Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) 1 (Petkovic 76 pen)

Feb 15 – Geneva
Servette (Sui) 0
Ludogorets (Bul) 0

Feb 15 – Graz
Sturm Graz (Aut) 4 (Biereth 4, Stankovic 27, Kiteishvili 64 pen, Camara 90+1)
Slovan Bratislava (Svk) 1 (Rodrigues 8)

Feb 15 – Brussels
Union SG (Bel) 2 (Rasmussen 31, Nilsson 68)
E. Frankfurt (Ger) 2 (Chaibi 3, Kalajdzic 10)

Knockout Round Play-Off – 2nd Leg

Feb 21 – Gent
Gent (Bel) 1 (Seck 69 og)
Maccabi Haifa (Isr) 1 (Pierrot 4)
Maccabi Haifa win 2-1 on aggregate

Feb 22 – Bodo
Bodo/Glimt (Nor) 1 (Berg 83)
Ajax (Ned) 2 (Berghuis 34, Taylor 114)
After Extra-Time. Ajax win 4-3 on aggregate

Feb 22 – Zagreb
Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) 1 (Kaneko 59)
Real Betis (Spa) 1 (Bakambu 38)
Dinamo Zagreb win 2-1 on aggregate

Feb 22 – Frankfurt
Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger) 1 (Dina Ebimbe 87)
Union SG (Bel) 2 (Puertas 47, Eckert 80)
Union SG win 4-3 on aggregate

Feb 22 – Budapest
Ferencvaros (Hun) 0
Olympiakos (Gre) 1 (El Kaabi 45 pen)
Olympiakos win 2-0 on aggregate

Feb 22 – Warsaw
Legia Warsaw (Pol) 0
Molde (Nor) 3 (Gulbrandsen 2, 67, Hestad 20)
Molde win 6-2 on aggregate

Feb 22 – Razgrad
Ludogorets (Bul) 0
Servette (Sui) 1 (Cognat 6)
Servette win 1-0 on aggregate

Feb 22 – Bratislava
Slovan Bratislava (Svk) 0
Sturm Graz (Aut) 1 (Biereth 52)
Sturm Graz win 5-1 on aggregate

Last 16 Draw

Servette v Viktoria Plzen; Molde v Club Brugge; Ajax v Aston Villa; Union SG v Fenerbahce; Sturm Graz v Lille; Dinamo Zagreb v PAOK; Maccabi Haifa v Fiorentina; Olympiakos v Maccabi Tel Aviv

2023-24 EFL CUP

Final

Feb 25 – Wembley
Chelsea 0
Liverpool 1 (Van Dijk 118)
After Extra-Time
Chelsea: Petrovic – Gusto, Disasi, Colwill, Chilwell (Chalobah 113); Caicedo, Fernandez; Palmer, Gallagher (Madueke 97), Sterling (Nkunku 67); Jackson (Mudryk 90).
Liverpool: Kelleher – Bradley (Clark 72), Konate (Quansah 105), Van Dijk, Robertson (Tsimikas 87); Mac Allister (McConnell 87), Endo, Gravenberch (Gomez 28); Elliott, Gakpo (Danns 87), Diaz.

SOUTH AMERICA

2024 COPA LIBERTADORES

First Round Qualifiers

Feb 6-8: Academia Puerto Cabello (Ven) 3-2 Defensor Sporting (Uru); Aurora (Bol) 1-0 Melgar (Per); Aucas (Ecu) 1-0 Nacional (Par)
Feb 13-15: Defensor Sporting (Uru) 1-0 Academia Puerto Cabello (Ven) (agg 3-3p); Melgar (Per) 1-1 Aurora (Bol) (agg 1-2); Nacional (Par) 3-0 Aucas (Ecu) (agg 3-1)

Second Round Qualifiers

Feb 20-22: Aguilas Doradas (Col) 0-0 Red Bull Bragantino (Bra); Always Ready (Bol) 6-1 Sporting Cristal (Per); Portuguesa (Ven) 1-2 Palestino (Chi); Nacional (Par) 1-0 Atletico Nacional (Col); Academia Puerto Cabello (Ven) 0-2 Nacional (Uru); Aurora (Bol) 1-1 Botafogo (Bra); Godoy Cruz (Arg) 0-1 Colo-Colo (Chi); Sportivo Trinidense (Par) 1-1 El Nacional (Ecu)
Feb 27-29: Palestino (Chi) 2-1 Portuguesa (Ven) (agg 4-2); Red Bull Bragantino (Bra) 0-0 Aguilas Doradas (Col) (agg p0-0); Sporting Cristal (Per) 3-1 Always Ready (Bol) (agg 4-7); Atletico Nacional (Col) 0-3 Nacional (Par) (agg 0-4); Botafogo (Bra) 6-0 Aurora (Bol) (agg 7-1); Nacional (Uru) 2-0 Academia Puerta Cabello (Ven) (agg 4-0); Colo-Colo (Chi) 0-0 Godoy Cruz (Arg) (agg 1-0); El Nacional (Ecu) 0-1 Sportivo Trinidense (Par) (agg 1-2)

2024 RECOPA SUDAMERICANA

1st Leg

Feb 22 – Quito
LDU (Ecu) 1 (Arce 90+2)
Fluminense (Bra) 0

2nd Leg

Feb 29 – Rio de Janeiro
Fluminense (Bra) 2 (Arias 76, 90 pen)
LDU (Ecu) 0
Fluminense win 2-1 on aggregate

2024 BRAZILIAN SUPER CUP

Feb 4 – Belo Horizonte
Palmeiras 0
Sao Paulo 0
Sao Paulo win 4-2 on pens

CONCACAF

2024 CONCACAF CHAMPIONS CUP

First Round – 1st Leg

Feb 6 – Guatemala City
Comunicaciones (Gua) 1 (Mejia 29)
Monterrey (Mex) 4 (Berterame 22, A. Gonzalez 51, Gallardo 71, R. Aguirre 85)

Feb 6 – Esteli
Real Esteli (Nic) 2 (Bonilla 7 pen, Fletes 47)
America (Mex) 1 (Quinones 90+1)

Feb 7 – Hamilton
Forge FC (Can) 1 (Campbell 31)
Guadalajara (Mex) 3 (Cowell 26, 63, Marin 45+1)

Feb 7 – Alajuela
Herediano (Crc) 1 (D. Vega 88)
Toluca (Mex) 2 (Pereira 16, Morales 57)

Feb 7 – Langford
Vancouver Whitecaps (Can) 1 (Kreilach 32)
Tigres UANL (Mex) 1 (Gignac 88)

Feb 20 – San Jose
Saprissa (Crc) 2 (Glesnes 28 og, Taylor 90)
Philadelphia Union (USA) 3 (Carranza 55, 76, 79)

Feb 20 – St Louis
St Louis City (USA) 2 (Parker 61, Kijima 90+1)
Houston Dynamo (USA) 1 (Kowalczyk 72)

Feb 21 – Langford
Cavalry FC (Can) 0
Orlando City (USA) 3 (McGuire 21, Torres 38, 76)

Feb 21 – Penonome
Independiente (Pan) 0
New England Revolution (USA) 1 (Chancalay 54)

Feb 22 – Kingston
Cavalier (Jam) 0
FC Cincinnati (USA) 2 (Santos 45+5, Pinto 87)

Feb 22 – Santiago
Moca (Dom) 0
Nashville SC (USA) 3 (Mukhtar 12, Surridge 25, Boyd 75)

First Round – 2nd Leg

Feb 13 – Zapopan
Guadalajara (Mex) 2 (Gutierrez 8, Castillo 62)
Forge FC (Can) 1 (Tavernier 90+3)
Guadalajara win 5-2 on aggregate

Feb 14 – Mexico City
America (Mex) 2 (Rodriguez 18, Zendejas 54)
Real Esteli (Nic) 0
America win 3-2 on aggregate

Feb 14 – San Nicolas de los Garza
Tigres UANL (Mex) 3 (Quinones 51, Herrera 85, Vigon 90+1)
Vancouver Whitecaps (Can) 0
Tigres UANL win 4-1 on aggregate

Feb 15 – Guadalupe
Monterrey (Mex) 3 (Moreno 10, Corona 31, Vazquez 79)
Comunicaciones (Gua) 0
Monterrey win 7-1 on aggregate

Feb 15 – Toluca
Toluca (Mex) 2 (Isais 5, Angulo 45)
Herediano (Crc) 3 (Rojas 57, Rodriguez 62, Canales 84)
4-4 on aggregate. Herediano win on away goals

Feb 27 – Houston
Houston Dynamo (USA) 1 (Sviatchenko 60)
St Louis City (USA) 0
2-2 on aggregate. Houston win on away goals

Feb 27 – Orlando
Orlando (USA) 3 (Lodeiro 48, Enrique 71, Smith 88)
Cavalry FC (Can) 1 (Bevan 64)
Orlando City win 6-1 on aggregate

Feb 27 – Chester
Philadelphia Union (USA) 3 (Carranza 17, Sullivan 26, Uhre 94)
Saprissa (Crc) 3 (Paradela 14 pen, Madrigal 28, Torres 62)
AET. Philadelphia Union win 6-5 on aggregate

Feb 28 – Cincinnati
FC Cincinnati (USA) 4 (Powell 19, Boupendza 34, Foster 71, Valenzuela 78)
Cavalier (Jam) 0
FC Cincinnati win 6-0 on aggregate

Feb 28 – Nashville
Nashville SC (USA) 4 (Gaines 13, Ajago 38, 53, Shaffelburg 45)
Moca (Dom) 0
Nashville SC win 7-0 on aggregate

Feb 29 – Foxborough
New England Revolution (USA) 3 (N. Gil 21, Chancalay 58, Kaye 90+3)
Independiente (Pan) 0
New England Revolution win 4-0 on aggregate

ASIA

2023-24 AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

West Zone

Last 16 – 1st Leg

Feb 14 – Qarshi
Nasaf Qarshi (Aze) 0
Al Ain (UAE) 0

Feb 14 – Riyadh
Al Fayha (KSA) 0
Al Nassr (KSA) 1 (Ronaldo 81)

Feb 15 – Namangan
Navbahor (Uzb) 0
Al Ittihad (KSA) 0

Feb 15 – Isafahan
Sepahan (Irn) 1 (Rezaeian 37)
Al Hilal (KSA) 3 (Malcom 57, Mitrovic 90+4, Al Hamdan 90+7)

East Zone

Last 16 – 1st Leg

Feb 13 – Jinan
Shandong Taishan (Chn) 2 (Fernandinho 67, Jadson 85)
Kawasaki Frontale (Jpn) 3 (Erison 28 pen, Marcinho 33, Ienaga 79)

Feb 14 – Pathum Thani
Bangkok United (Tha) 2 (Nitipong 35, Mahmoud Eid 90+2)
Yokohama F. Marinos (Jpn) 2 (Elber 18, Watanabe 24)

Feb 14 – Jeonju
Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors (Kor) 2 (Hernandes 17, Ahn Hyeon-beom 64)
Pohang Steelers (Kor) 0

Feb 15 – Ulsan
Ulsan HD (Kor) 3 (Joo Min-kyu 37, 45 pen, Seol Young-woo 61)
Ventforet Kofu (Jpn) 0

West Zone

Last 16 – 2nd Leg

Feb 21 – Al Ain
Al Ain (UAE) 2 (Laba 55, Rahimi 90+2)
Nasaf Qarshi (Aze) 1 (Mozgovoy 51)
Al Ain win 2-1 on aggregate

Feb 21 – Riyadh
Al Nassr (KSA) 2 (Otavio 17, Ronaldo 86)
Al Fayha (KSA) 0
Al Nassr win 3-0 on aggregate

Feb 22 – Riyadh
Al Hilal (KSA) 3 (S. Al Dawsari 76, Neves 82, Mitrovic 90+7)
Sepahan (Irn) 1 (Ahmadzadeh 54)
Al Hilal win 6-2 on aggregate

Feb 22 – Jeddah
Al Ittihad (KSA) 2 (Hamdallah 45+6, Tabatadze 87 og)
Navbahor (Uzb) 1 (Benzema 25 og)
Al Ittihad win 2-1 on aggregate

East Zone

Last 16 – 2nd Leg

Feb 20 – Kawasaki
Kawasaki Frontale (Jpn) 2 (Miura 30, Erison 59)
Shandong Taishan (Chn) 4 (Cryzan 8, 73, Gao Zhunyi 25, Jadson 90+7)
Shandong Taishan win 6-5 on aggregate

Feb 20 – Pohang
Pohang Steelers (Kor) 1 (Park Chan-yong 12)
Jeonbuk Hyundai (Kor) 1 (Jeong Tae-wook 76)
Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors win 3-1 on aggregate

Feb 21 – Tokyo
Ventforet Kofu (Jpn) 1 (Mitsuhira 88)
Ulsan (Kor) 2 (Kim Ji-hyeon 11, Joo Min-kyu 90+4)
Ulsan HD win 5-1 on aggregate

Feb 21 – Yokohama
Yokohama F. Marinos (Jpn) 1 (Anderson Lopes 120+2 pen)
Bangkok United (Tha) 0
After Extra-Time. Yokohama win 3-2 on aggregate

2023-24 AFC CUP

West Zone

Zonal Semi-Finals

Feb 12-13: Al Riffa (Bhr) 1-1 Al Nahda (Oma); Al Ahed (Lbn) 0-1 Al Kahrabaa (Irq)
Feb 19-20:
Al Nahda (Oma) 3-1 Al Riffa (Bhr) (*AET*, agg 4-2); Al Kahrabaa (Irq) 0-1 Al Ahed (Lbn) (*AET*, agg 1-1p)
Winners advance to the West Asia Zone final

ASEAN Zone

Zonal Semi-Finals

Feb 13:
Macarthur (Aus) 3-0 Sabah (Mas); Central Coast Mariners (Aus) 4-0 Phnom Penh Crown (Cam)

Zonal Final

Feb 22:
Macarthur (Aus) 2-3 Central Coast Mariners (Aus)
After Extra-Time
Winners advance to the inter-zone play-off semi-finals alongside East Asia's Taichung Futuro (Tpe), Central Asia's Abdysh-Ata Kant (Kgz) and South Asia's Odisha (Ind)

2024 JAPANESE SUPER CUP

Feb 17 – Tokyo
Vissel Kobe 0
Kawasaki Frontale 1 (Wermeskerken 48)

AFRICA

2023-24 CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Feb 24 – Nouakchott
FC Nouadhibou (Mtn) 0
Mamelodi Sundowns (RSA) 2 (Kekana 21, Lorch 90+1)

Feb 24 – Lubumbashi
TP Mazembe (Cod) 3 (Beya 32, Likonza 45+1, Mwamba 90+2)
Pyramids (Egy) 0

Mar 2 – Pretoria
Mamelodi Sundowns (RSA) 1 (Shalulile 38 pen)
TP Mazembe (Cod) 0

Mar 2 – Cairo
Pyramids (Egy) 2 (Mayele 73, 90+1)
FC Nouadhibou (Mtn) 2 (Bessam 64, M'bareck 82)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
M. Sundowns (Q)	6	4	1	1	7	1	13
TP Mazembe (Q)	6	3	1	2	6	2	10
Nouadhibou	6	1	2	3	4	9	5
Pyramids	6	1	2	3	3	8	5

Group B

Feb 23 – Abidjan
ASEC Abidjan (Civ) 0
Simba (Tan) 0

Feb 24 – Francistown
Jwaneng Galaxy (Bot) 0
Wydad (Mar) 1 (Gaddarine 45+2)

Mar 2 – Marrakesh
Wydad (Mar) 1 (Lahtimi 18)
ASEC Abidjan (Civ) 0

Mar 2 – Dar es Salaam
Simba (Tan) 6 (Ntibazonkiza 8, Jobe 14, Denis 22, Chama 76, Chasambi 86, Ngoma 89)
Jwaneng Galaxy (Bot) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
ASEC Abidjan (Q)	6	3	2	1	7	2	11
Simba (Q)	6	2	3	1	9	2	9
Wydad	6	3	0	3	3	4	9
Jwaneng Galaxy	6	1	1	4	1	12	4

Group C

Feb 23 – Dar es Salaam
Al Hilal (Sud) 0
Petro Atletico (Ang) 0

Feb 24 – Tunis
Etoile Sahel (Tun) 0
Esperance (Tun) 2 (Sasse 26, El Ayeb 41)

Mar 2 – Tunis
Esperance (Tun) 1 (Meriah 22)
Al Hilal (Sud) 0

Mar 2 – Luanda
Petro Atletico (Ang) 2 (Toro 38, Julinho 71)
Etoile Sahel (Tun) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Petro Atletico (Q)	6	3	3	0	5	0	12
Esperance (Q)	6	3	2	1	6	3	11
Al Hilal	6	1	2	3	4	5	5
Etoile Sahel	6	1	1	4	2	9	4

Group D

Feb 16 – Algiers
Chabab Belouizdad (Alg) 0
Al Ahly (Egy) 0

Feb 23 – Kumasi
Medeama (Gha) 0
Al Ahly (Egy) 1 (El Shahat 48)

Feb 24 – Dar es Salaam
Young Africans (Tan) 4 (Yahya 43, Aziz Ki 46, Musonda 48, Gnadou 84)
Chabab Belouizdad (Alg) 0

Mar 1 – Cairo
Al Ahly (Egy) 1 (El Shahat 46)
Young Africans (Tan) 0

Mar 1 – Algiers
Chabab Belouizdad (Alg) 3 (Benguit 27, Wamba 42, Jallow 84)
Medeama (Gha) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ahly (Q)	6	3	3	0	6	1	12
Young Africans (Q)	6	2	2	2	9	6	8
Belouizdad	6	2	2	2	7	6	8
Medeama	6	1	1	4	3	12	4

DR CONGO

Regular Season Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saint Eloi Lupopo	17	15	1	1	36	7	46
TP Mazembe	16	12	4	0	52	7	40
Lubumbashi Sport	18	9	6	3	31	24	33
Don Bosco	18	8	4	6	23	23	28
Simba	18	5	8	5	18	15	23
Blessing	18	6	5	7	21	24	23
Sanga Balende	17	5	4	8	15	20	19
Panda B52	18	3	6	9	9	28	15
Groupe Bazano	18	2	2	14	20	47	8
Tshinkunku	18	1	4	13	11	41	7

Regular Season Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maniema Union	18	14	1	3	36	11	43
Vita Club	18	11	1	6	23	9	34
Dauphins Noirs	18	9	5	4	20	13	32
Aigles du Congo	18	9	2	7	21	14	29
OC Renaissance	18	6	5	7	23	24	23
Motema Pembe	18	6	3	9	14	27	21
Etoile de Kivu	18	6	2	10	20	25	20
Celeste	18	5	4	9	13	21	19
Kuya Sport	18	4	4	10	11	26	16
Rangers	18	3	5	10	12	29	14

Top five teams in each group enter championship round, bottom five teams enter relegation round

OCEANIA

2024 OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Qualifying Stage

Feb 17 – Nuku'alofa
Vaivase-Tai (Sam) 4 (Taualai 16, 43, Kwan 45, Tumua 90)
Tupapa Maraerenga (Cok) 0

Feb 17 – Nuku'alofa
Veitongo (Tga) 13 (Uhatahi 11, Polovili 15, Kendler 22, 43, 62, Feke 26, 85, Lutu 33, 61, Uhatahi 76, 87, 90, Fifita 77)
Vaiala Tongan (Asa) 0

Feb 20 – Nuku'alofa
Tupapa Maraerenga (Cok) 14 (Fuhiniu 1, 82, L. Harmon 4, 16, 31, 45, 45, 73, 75, G. Harmon 5, Connolly 67, 90, Taokia 79, Gibbens 84)
Vaiala Tongan (Asa) 0

Feb 20 – Nuku'alofa
Veitongo (Tga) 0
Vaivase-Tai (Sam) 0

Feb 23 – Nuku'alofa
Vaiala Tongan (Asa) 0
Vaivase-Tai (Sam) 14 (Tumua 2, 18 pen, 46, 66, 80, Nanumea 13, 14, 45, 48, Taualai 26, 45+3, 64, Leiatava 45+6, Tanielu 90+6)

Feb 23 – Nuku'alofa
Tupapa Maraerenga (Cok) 3 (Connolly 43 pen, 57, Tairi 63)
Veitongo (Tga) 2 (Kendler 23, 70)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vaivase-Tai FC*	3	2	1	0	18	0	7
Tupapa Maraerenga	3	2	0	1	17	6	6
Veitongo	3	1	1	1	15	3	4
Vaiala Tongan	3	0	0	3	0	41	0

**Qualify for the group stage*

April 2024 *Vol. 64 No.8*

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PICTURES
Pictures copyright: Getty Images

SPECIAL THANKS THIS ISSUE TO:
Keir Radnedge, Mark Gleeson, James Nalton, Alex Brotherton, Steve Menary, Juraj Vrdoljak & Alamy

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Full annual subscription rate (13 issues)
UK: £77.87, USA & EU: £91, RoW: £98.

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Robert Prosinecki

Netherlands 1 Croatia 2

1998 World Cup, third-place play-off, Paris

The former Croatia midfield playmaker looks back on his role in firing his country to third place at their first-ever World Cup

"I remember that we approached that game with mixed feelings. On one hand, there was still disappointment in our camp after the defeat against France in the semi-finals. We had a 1-0 lead, but lost 2-1 after two goals by Lilian Thuram – he'd never scored for France before that. We felt that we could have reached the final. On the other hand, we knew that we must try to bounce back and try to win the game for third place against Netherlands.

They had a great team – for me, the best team at that World Cup. They should have won against Brazil in the semi-finals, and only lost on penalties. To be honest, against us for a large part of the game they were also the better team. But we possessed enough quality, we defended well and our goalkeeper Drazen Ladic was excellent.

I scored the first goal. It was a counter-attack. I received the ball from Robert Jarni. I was in the middle of the box, with three opponents in front of me. I turned around, pirouetted and immediately shot at goal. It was a fine goal, one of the best I scored in my career for club or the national team. That goal was also a big satisfaction for me, given that in the previous matches in the knockout stage our national coach, the late Miroslav Blazevic, didn't pick me for the starting line-up.

Netherlands dominated and scored the equaliser [through Bolo Zenden], but Davor Suker scored late in the first half and we managed to keep that 2-1 lead until the final whistle. As I said, we were not the better team in that game, but we succeeded to beat an excellent opponent. The Dutch were a really strong team, with top players like Seedorf, Davids, Bergkamp, Overmars, Kluivert – but that's football. In the semi-final, we were better than France, but we lost that game.

Third-place play-off... Prosinecki in action during the bronze medal match

Anyway, it was a wonderful feeling to end the World Cup with a win, to return back home as victors. No doubt, the third place was a massive success for a small country like Croatia at our first participation at a World Cup.

> "I turned around, pirouetted and immediately shot at goal. It was a fine goal, one of the best I scored"

Of course, I wished that I had more playing time during that World Cup, but I'm happy and proud that I contributed to that victory that brought us the bronze medal."

Interview by Vladimir Novak

Opening goal...Edwin van der Sar watches Prosinecki's shot hit the back of the net

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